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Walter Papp

His willing victim was

THE GIRL WHO LOVED DEATH

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN

VOLUME 26
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1952

MEN BEHIND AMAZING STORIES

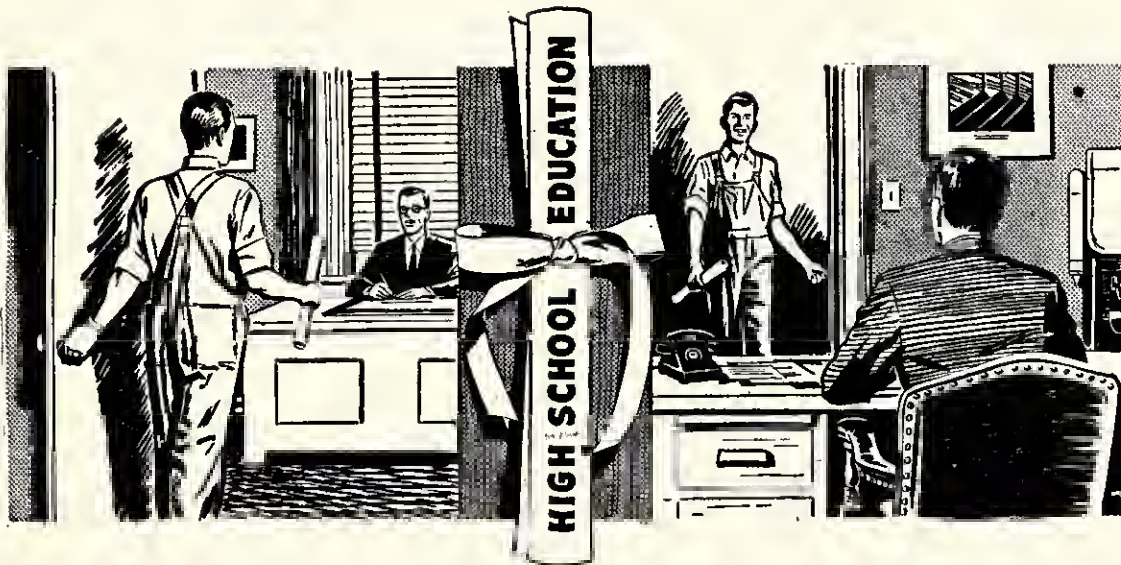


H. B. Hickey

Authorship, like acting, is make-believe, and an editor's request for an autobiography is a sudden request to make believe I'm me. An invisible barrier of self-consciousness, like Martian zet, springs up between my fingers and typewriter and I realise I don't know how much of me is really me and how much I've made up. The time and place of my birth are dull facts, recorded by the Chicago Board of Health. I know for certain that once I lived in a house with a high stairway - I remember the fall that broke my leg.

But the rest is lost in the mists. For all I know I may really be the son of a prince, I may really have licked Jack Dempsey. Of such dreams are childhood, and authors, made. The truth is prosaic. I became an author because I happened not to like the job I held, and because I happened to own a typewriter. I could dream on paper and get paid for it - what more could anyone want? I've dreamed by the ream. In five years I must have written and sold over a hundred stories, from

(Continued on page 162)



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SEPTEMBER, 1952

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— *All* **STORIES** *Complete* —

- THE GIRL WHO LOVED DEATH (Short Novel—20,000) . . . by Paul W. Fairman 9
 Illustrated by William Slade

They were the darndest mess of questions a private eye ever had to answer. And the toughest one of all was: How did they cut a normal gal down to ice-box size?

- FLIGHT OF THE VAMPIRES (Short—5,500) by John Russel Fearn 44
 Illustrated by William Slade

The British Government had set up protection devices against every weapon they could think of. But who could have expected them to include vampires?

- ADAM'S FIRST WIFE (Novelette—13,000) by Rog Phillips 56
 Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

If a beautiful girl makes a play for you, it would be well to find out about her. She may be a succubus. But that's just the trouble. There's no way of finding out!

- I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE (Novelette—13,000) by Dean Evans 84
 Illustrated by Tom Beecham

He kept telling them he'd been there before—that he knew his way around. But they kept on refusing to believe him, and pretty soon he didn't believe it either.

- THE MACHINE THAT KNEW TOO MUCH (Short—6,500) by William P. McGivern 106
 Illustrated by Gaylord Welker

The insurance company bought a machine with which to compute premiums. But it was far more interested in what the office villain was up to.

- SUCKER FROM SPACE (Novelette—13,000) by H. B. Hickey 118
 Illustrated by Ed Emsler

Even though he knew how to pilot a space ship all over the galaxy and was on speaking terms with Martians—they still had him pegged as prize sucker.

Cover by Walter Popp, illustrating a scene
 from "The Girl Who Loved Death"

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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

SHE was the sort of little old lady every man secretly wants as a grandmother. If the doll you bought your little girl on her tenth birthday could age and become seventy, it would look a great deal like this little old lady.

SHE was sitting backwards on the New Haven commuter's train and I took a seat facing her. She had two magazines and she had laid one on the seat beside her, presumably to discourage anyone from sitting beside her, as old ladies—and young ones—often do. I glanced at the magazine lying on the seat and noted it was a copy of *AMAZING STORIES*.

DRAWING courage from its familiar cover, I leaned forward and said, "Pardon me, madam, but I am the editor of that magazine and I naturally have a great interest in it. Would you mind telling me how long you have been reading it?" She smiled as I added, hastily, "I hope you won't consider me rude."

"Of course not, young man. I consider it very nice that you ask me. I have been reading it for years—just years. I'd really be lost without it."

I GLOWED for two reasons. She had called me "young man" and she liked *AMAZING STORIES*. "Evidently," I said, "you are one of the early converts to the medium. You might be interested in knowing that public acceptance of science fiction is increasing by leaps and bounds."

Her smile deepened, indicating sincere interest. "Science fiction is really fascinating. Spatial drives—the stress and strain quotients of space ships—the brave young men who will face the dangers of the void in order to reach the planets."

I beamed.

BRAKES ground beneath us and the little old lady prepared to leave the train. She held out her hand and I took it as

though it were a piece of eggshell china. She said, "Goodbye, Mr. Hibbs. It was so nice to meet you."

"Not Hibbs," I replied. "Browne—Howard Browne."

This confused her. She glanced at the magazine in her hand. "But didn't you say you were the editor of *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST*?"

"No—no," I replied, weakly. "I am the editor of *AMAZING STORIES*. The magazine you laid on the seat beside you."

She glanced down. "Oh—that isn't mine. Someone else must have left it there."

"But—but you know so much about science fiction—"

She smiled. "I have a nephew. He watches *Captain Vidco*, and *Space Patrol*, and I don't know what all." She glanced down at the copy of *AMAZING STORIES*. "My-my! I didn't know they published a magazine about science fiction."

"Oh, yes," I mumbled. "In fact there are several on the market."

"Well, now, isn't that nice," she said. "Goodbye, Mr. Hibbs."

"Goodbye," I said. "Ah—no the name's Browne—Howard Browne. Not Hibbs."

But the little old lady was out of earshot.

IT OCCURRED to me recently that progress comes—vast and awe-inspiring inventions bedazzle us—but people remain basically unchanged.

One of the first items of interest to reach my ears by radio—via an ancient crystal set—was: "Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Glotz on their umpteenth wedding anniversary."

It is not difficult, therefore, to extrapolate an inconceivably vast and expensive interplanetary communication system announcing to a listening galaxy: "Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Glotz on their umpteenth wedding anniversary."

The world changes, but people remain basically the same. —HB

LET'S MAKE SOME MISTAKES



By Ralph Cox

SCIENCE recognizes, as does anyone, that there are two ways of making things. One is by the scientific method, which involves a long and tortuous chain of mathematical reasoning, in some cases so complicated that it cannot be applied to many fields. The other method, the method Man has employed since his first days on Earth—still employs to a great extent—and which was necessary until the last few hundred years, is trial and error.

A certain type of mind tends to pooh-pooh the experimental "let's give it a whirl" attitude, assuming that unless reasons are known for everything, nothing is accomplished. The gross and fallacious error in this sort of thinking is easily detected by observing the enormous number of things which have matured in this trial and error manner, and which cannot essentially be improved upon. Dozens of examples come to mind, ranging from household utensils to items like Eskimo clothing and hand tools. Even more complicated machines such as watches and many machine tools are primary examples of the trial and error design technique. It is interesting to note that invariably these things have reached a state of perfection without the intervention of mathematical design.

A potent example of this also is the matter of boat and ship design. The hulls of vessels—that part beneath the water—have not changed basically in a thousand years. Ever since Man first took a log, removed its bark, sharpened the ends and hollowed out the core, the improvements have come slowly by the experimental

technique of trying a "ship-shape" and then seeing how easily it went through the water.

Hundreds of such examples could be enumerated, taken from all phases of human activity. In the case of tools, the basic ones, such as hammers and saws, etc., have undergone very little improvement save in the metallurgical aspects which, of course, evolved experimentally themselves when men discovered the technique of hardening a green stake by heating it and subsequently applying the similar method to soft copper and then iron.

In the most sophisticated laboratories the trial and error routine finds application. Often, it is simply wasteful and confusing to spend time calculating when a few tries will show the correct system. Indeed, it often happens that the calculations follow the basic experiment, explaining it after the job has been done!

In light of these factual observations, it is certainly not possible to disparage the mechanic and "tinkerer". Some of our greatest inventions have stemmed from "trial and error-ers" like Edison, DeForest, and a host of others. Just as a few years ago it was the practice to laugh at the "long-haired" scientists, there is a tendency now to reverse the process and laugh at the technicians and the experimenters, the craftsmen and the mechanics. This is faulty and incorrect. Each complements the other, each is necessary to the other. And the future will bear this out stronger than ever, despite the increasing complications of modern technological change.



There was something of interest in the refrigerator—and it wasn't the milk.

THE GIRL WHO LOVED DEATH



By Paul W. Fairman

Nick Saturday, private eye, went out to find Helen Burdette, lost gal. He had the right town and the right street — but the wrong world.

I WAS SITTING at my shabby desk, in my shabby office, after the accepted manner of a private eye with no cases, when he walked in. He came stiffly, as though on wooden legs, and his mouth was twisted into a permanent leer. My hand stole quietly toward the right top drawer of my desk.

I knew all about my visitor. He walked stiffly because he'd lost both legs in the war and they'd given him a new pair. The leer came from a set of false teeth bought from a bargain dentist. I knew what the guy wanted, too—his rent. It was three months overdue and I didn't have it.

His name was Mike Conlin and he was a pretty good joe. He came and sat down beside my desk, saw me fumbling in the drawer, and offered me one of his. A Chesterfield. I took it gratefully. I said, "If you're looking for excuses, you're going to be surprised. I'm fresh out. No dough—no

alibis. No prospects."

He was a man who had suffered a lot. It showed in his eyes. They had that depth found only in the eyes of people who have lived the hard way. Lines came only when he smiled, as he was doing now. He said, "Why don't you give it up, Nick? It's a tough game. I unders and even Philip Marlowe and Paul Pine are out of work."

"It's my racket. Can I help it if people are getting too yellow to break the statutes?"

He regarded me pensively for a few moments. I said, "Maybe in a week or so—if things break..."

"I didn't come after any money. It's just that a thing came up—a way we can cut the debit and give you a little practice. God knows you must need it by now."

I was getting ready to snarl when he took the Chesters from his pocket, held one back, and tossed the pack in

front of me. How can you snarl at a guy like that? "I'm open for business—even on due-bills. Tell me."

He looked down, slowly, to the things he walked on. His eyes were wistful. "I had a girl once," he said.

"Quit feeling sorry for yourself."

"I'm not. That's part of it. It was a pre-Korea romance."

"A 'Dear John?'"

"Not exactly. After I got back she came to the hospital twice, but something had gone out of it—something was missing."

I was ready to bark at him again, but I saw that he wasn't punning. He missed the obvious completely.

"I don't think the loss of my legs had anything to do with it. I honestly don't. I'm convinced it would have been the same if I'd come back whole."

It seemed a good thing for him to believe. I said, "You just...kind of drifted apart?"

"That was it. She didn't come again. I left the hospital eventually, but we were out of touch. I didn't try to contact her."

Another silent interlude while I lighted a second cigarette. He watched intently. After I'd taken three drags and it was going well, he said, "Six months passed and I'd done a pretty good job of forgetting her. Then—this morning—there was a little item in the paper."

HE HAD a *Gazette* folded in his side pocket. He took it out, opened it, laid it on my desk, pointed. "Right there. Evidently not important enough to make the front page, but it knocked all my forgetting into a cocked hat."

I concentrated on the item—a scant inch in a place Mother Mitchell hadn't quite filled with her mouth-tempting recipes:

GIRL DISAPPEARS

Police were today investigating a report that Helen Burdette, 26, of 1126 Weber Place, is missing. The girl resided with her mother, Mrs. Patrice Burdette, 47, a widow. Miss Burdette worked as a stenographer at the Regal Toy Company, 1750 Wilson Avenue. The police are not yet convinced of foul play.

I pushed the paper back across the desk. "Probably stayed with a girl friend."

"Could be," Conlin mused. "Probably nothing sinister about it at all. But I'm in the position of a guy with money to burn—" he grinned fleetingly—"so far as you're concerned, that is. So I'd like to have you look into it. Go over and see Mrs. Burdette—let her know somebody's on her side."

"The girl herself will probably answer the door."

"Could be. In that case we only tear one corner off your rent bill."

I shrugged. "You're the boss—boss. I gather I'm being retained to find one lost, strayed or stolen girl named Helen Burdette. It might cost you a lot. It's a long walk to Weber Place, and my car is in the clutches of the capitalists."

He dug into his pocket and brought out the green paper. He gave me some of it and said, "Fortunately the busses are still running. Let me know when you find out anything—just like in the detective stories."

"Will do."

He took one of the Chesterfields, lit it, and walked carefully out of the office.

I CAUGHT a Lincoln Street bus to a cab stand on Adams and Western. Sam Kane was sitting behind the wheel of his beaten-up hack. He said, "Nick Saturday! As I live and breathe. Great to see you."

"How about the fifty for locating the drunk that—"

"I know—I know, Nick. I been wanting to slip you, but my damage check ain't come through yet. I ain't even got gas money. The wife's been grabbing every cent—"

"Maybe I can take some of it out in trade. Got a little running around to do."

"You got money for gas?"

"Hell, no."

Sam sighed and straightened behind the wheel. "Get in."

He got the hack rolling and pulled into a cut-rate gas station where a fat man in dirty overalls was pulling the rear wheels off an old Chevrolet. Sam got out and went over and braced the fat man. The latter scowled, then came over and shot a tankful of gas into Sam's hack.

After the guy went back to the Chevrolet, Sam got into the hack and said, "I got that repair job for Louie but he's got no dough for commission. so I took it out in gas. Where to, Nick?"

I gave him the Weber Place address and sat back on the ratty cushions feeling like a plutocrat. It really wasn't such a bad world after all. Nobody made any money, but we all got along.

On the way over, I had Sam stop in front of a pawn shop. I went in and used one of Mike Conlin's tens to get my gun out of hock, and then I was ready for business.

That block on Weber Place wasn't good or bad. It lay just about dead center between the two. The address I wanted was a red brick anthill with about fifty cells, according to the directory. I found the one I wanted. Then, from force of habit, I pushed three other buttons. One of them buzzed me in and I walked up to the second floor and found 219 on a neat little white card over another signal

button. I pushed the button and waited. Nothing happened. I pushed it again. I could hear the muffled bell beyond the panel, but no one inside did anything about it.

I tried the knob. The door opened. I went inside.

I didn't belong in there, of course, but I've heard tell of presidents who didn't belong in the White House either, so I didn't let it worry me any.

The door opened directly into a neat but not gaudy living room. The furniture was the kind you buy by the carload to furnish big red brick ant-hills. The carpeting was bought by the square acre and cut to fit. The artificial fireplace had a gas log in it. The carpet was clean. The place was utterly still.

I called out, "Anybody home?" trying to make it sound real casual and cheery. Nobody answered.

The next logical point of progression was a closed door in the far wall. It could have led into the bathroom, but it didn't. I opened it and saw a bed covered with a pink spread. A woman was sitting on the bed. She wore a green dressing gown and there was something peculiar about her. At her feet was a long cardboard packing box. She was staring down fixedly at it. "Yes—something definitely peculiar."

I stepped into the room to make a further investigation and the ceiling fell on my head. I thought it did, anyhow. At least, something fell on my head. It could have been the ceiling or an anvil or a section of a football stadium. Only one point could be taken as a certainty.

Something fell on my head.

WHEN I WOKE up I had two heads. A new one had grown onto the one I'd come in with. I reached up and touched the new one

and yelped from the pain. It wasn't a second head. It was only a bump the size of a cantaloupe. As I opened my eyes, I'd evidently just about ridden out my ten cents' worth, because the merry-go-round slowed down and stopped with a sickening lurch. I didn't have any more money so I got off with the calliope still howling, while they packed up the carnival and moved on to a new town and I was standing in the middle of a quiet bedroom—just another private eye with a bump on his head.

Nothing had changed so far as I could see. The sun was still pouring in the small window. The pink spread was still on the bed. The woman still wore the green dressing gown and hadn't moved an inch. She still sat on the edge of the bed staring down at the box at her feet.

She stared into the box and I stared at her—for a full minute. She could have been a statue—or a frozen body—or a person hypnotized into rigidity. I took a step forward. Nothing happened. I took another and had myself a long look into the cardboard box. It held a doll. A big doll in a fluffy blue dress. A doll over two feet long with white shoes and stockings and staring, blue eyes.

But eyes not more fixed nor staring than those of the woman, I stepped close and extended a hand. But I didn't touch the woman. Something stopped me the last moment. Something told me that if I wanted all hell to break loose, I should touch the woman.

I didn't want all hell to break loose, so I rerouted my hand downward—slowly—very slowly—and picked the doll out of its box.

A beautiful doll. One any four-year-old would burn a house down to come by. But nothing that I could see to turn a grown woman into a staring

statue. I went over the doll thoroughly, then bent over and returned it to the box. The woman hadn't flicked an eye lash.

I backed out of the room, carefully, wondering from whence had come the attempt to fracture my skull. Certainly not from the woman on the bed. My eyes had been on her as I'd blacked out. I went to the telephone stand and concentrated on a yellow wall-card that listed various numbers. There was a drugstore, a delicatessen, an undertaker, a garage, a baby-sitting service, and a doctor.

I called the doctor—a William Kinder, M. D. He evidently wasn't a very good doctor—just as I evidently wasn't a very good private eye—because he was sitting in his office waiting for business and said he could come right over.

I WAITED ten minutes, during which time I snooped the joint in approved private-eye style—finding any number of things that were none of my business. But if there is anything a private dick thrives on it's a volume of items which are none of his business. I pocketed a few of the more interesting ones.

A card reading: *Hillside Sanatorium for Women—Ellen Kornbloom, R.N.* A corner of the telephone book cover with two names and phone numbers on it: *The Frolics Cafe—State 2-9300*, and the *Regal Toy Company—Placer 4-8086*.

I still had a few minutes left, so I sat down to drag from my mind a little thing that had been worrying me, and give it the once-over.

A small thing, with possibly no foundation whatever, but just before I'd been bopped my eyes had rested on the cardboard box at which the frozen woman had been—and still was—staring. I'd been sure it held a doll,

but I was sure also that the doll had been naked. I'd seen expanses of pink skin—certainly no frilly blue dress. Another impression—one of which I was not sure enough to mention before witnesses, but which plagued me nonetheless—that it had been an obscene doll; one you wouldn't give your little girl for Christmas.

But this last was so vague in my memory, I was forced to charge it off as illusion. I was sure enough of the other point, however, to give it thought—to build from it. If I was right, some joker had waited for me behind the door—had slugged me and then put a nice blue dress on a naked doll and had gone off about other business.

This seemed pretty silly. Why would the lack of a dress on a doll kindle the urge in some party to knock my brains out? I couldn't figure it. Then the buzzer sounded and I opened the door. •

For what came in I could have called Central Casting in Hollywood rather than a local number. He was short, pale, and wore black shoes and had a meticulous black Van Dyke. He asked, "Did you call for a doctor?" I said I had, and he wanted to know where the patient was. I led him toward the bedroom.

He took two steps inside and stopped, staring. If he'd had a tail to go with the beard, he'd have passed for a prize bird dog on point.

Now he tiptoed forward and peered down into the frozen woman's face. He looked at her from several angles but kept his hands off her. Then he turned and tiptoed out into the living room. I followed him.

He said, "We've got to get through to the fire department immediately." The inhalator squad carries a strait-jacket. We're going to need it."

HE PUT the call through, then dropped into a chair and wiped his face with a snowy handkerchief. I sat down opposite him. I asked, "What do you think is wrong with her, Doctor?"

He replaced the handkerchief in his breast pocket. "Shock of some sort. It's not epilepsy. Some sort of terrific shock. Her static condition can't last much longer. I hope they get here in time with that strait-jacket. There'll be trouble when she comes out of it."

"What do you think caused it?"

He shrugged. "I haven't the least idea. I haven't even got a history of the patient. Does she have a family doctor?"

"I don't know."

This centered his interest on me. "You didn't give me your name over the phone."

I told him also why I was there.

The doctor thought it over. "From the posture and the intensity of the shock, I'd say the cause of her condition was something other than the daughter's disappearance."

"The doll?"

"That hardly seems logical either. Shock is a tricky thing, though. Sight of the doll, coupled with thoughts of her daughter—"

"But you don't believe that did it?"

"No." Kinder glanced nervously toward the bedroom door. You could tell he didn't like what was inside.

I said, "If you're afraid she'll come to, how about giving her a shot? I'll try to hold her and you can work fast."

He shook his head. "We'd better ride out our luck and hope they get here in time."

They came pretty fast—two young men in white coats, one carrying a canvas bundle, the other a black bag similar to that of Doctor Kinder.

Kinder introduced himself, then turned to me. "What about relatives—nearest of kin?"

"I don't know of any."

He thought that over before he said, "Well, let's get it over with."

We went into the bedroom. Kinder opened his bag and filled a hypodermic. He motioned me back. "These men are experienced in handling cases like this. You stand by. I'll yell if we need you."

They knew their business. They moved in on the woman from either side. They made me glad I hadn't touched her because, at first contact, she came up off the bed like a steel spring. But they were ready. They took quick holds on her after a manner of long experience. One of them even had a hand to spare. He used it to stifle an animal scream that welled up from her taut throat.

Kinder was no amateur, either. He latched onto her right arm and got the hypo in and out before she even felt it. Then he grabbed the strait-jacket and the three men—working as a machine—got her into it.

It was really needed, because the shot didn't take effect for almost five minutes. During that time they kept her under control, working as gently as possible. When she passed out, they stepped back and wiped their faces.

"You'll take her to the County Hospital?"

Kinder glanced up at me, nodding. "It's customary. The police will start a routine search to locate relatives. If you find any, you might let them know."

They carried Mrs. Burdette to a black ambulance in the street and drove away.

Sam was asleep behind the wheel of his hack. I nudged him awake and we headed back toward my office. When we got there Sam looked at the

meter and said, "I owe you \$6.40 less than I did. You want me to wait, or can I go out and try to make a buck?"

"I'll pick you up at the stand when I want you. So long."

MIKE CONLIN lived in three rooms on the third floor. I went up and knocked on his door, I could hear him coming. He opened the door and said, "My left leg's squeaking like hell. I'll have to oil it. Come on in."

I went in and he cracked a bottle and I took two stiff drinks.

"Any progress to report?"

I shook my head. "Haven't even got started yet. There were interruptions." I sat down with a third shot in my paw and told him.

He listened to the whole thing. When I'd finished he said, "I didn't expect it to be easy. I've got a hunch Helen's in real trouble. Poor Mrs. Burdette."

"I don't get it. How could a doll set a woman off like that? It doesn't make sense."

Mike looked up quickly. "How much rent did you owe me?"

"Two hundred and a quarter."

"We're going to forget about that. Call it a three-month concession. We'll start from scratch—right now."

"Why the generosity?"

"I want you to go ahead with this and I want your best. Under that setup I don't think I could get it. I think men work better for money than for anything else. What's your regular fee?"

I told him. Fifteen dollars a day and expenses. He forked out some more bills. "There's three hundred. When that's gone, let me know. I don't care how much you spend. I want action."

I thought it over for a minute before I said, "Look—I think you're making a mistake."

"How so?"

"Maybe I'm not the right man for you."

"I don't follow."

"Maybe I'm not the smartest private dick in town, and you can afford the best. I'm rough and I'm tough. My face proves that. It's been hit with everything but a Cadillac crankcase. That doesn't make me smart, though. You can hire a lot of guys who don't get behind in their rent."

He looked at me for a surprised moment, then grinned. "Thanks for giving me the chance, but I'll take you. I like tough mugs. They win wars. Brains are a dime, a dozen. Get going."

I said, "Okay—you're paying the bills." I got up and started for the door.

Mike said, "I wish you'd go over to the County right away and check on Mrs. Burdette. See that she gets the best. I've had a hunch any relatives you find aren't going to help with the bills."

"Okay—I'll let you know."

I went downtown first and got my Pontiac roadster out of hock. Now I had my gun and my car and almost two hundred bucks in my pocket. Enough to lick the world. I headed for the County Hospital.

A SMALL pretty blonde was in the receiving room, but the pleasantness was offset by the presence of a large, horsefaced brunette who was homely and seemed to be glad of it. I asked for Mrs. Burdette's ward number.

The blonde began rifling through a card index. The brunette snorted, "Ambulance chaser?"

I said, "Uh-huh. Bad arches. I have to work inside."

The brunette snorted again. The

blonde looked up. "When was she admitted?"

"She just came in. Couldn't have been more than an hour."

"Sorry. We have no listing."

"Maybe it's not recorded yet."

"It would be. Listings are made immediately."

"What type of case?" the brunette wanted to know.

This cheered me because I didn't know she cared. "Psychiatric, probably," I told her.

This was grounds for a fresh snort. "She wouldn't be registered here. Psycho is Building B. Separate."

I thanked the blonde and went through the main building to the smaller one back by the morgue, marked B. An ex-football husky held down the desk in there. He asked, "Looking for somebody, chum?" His manner showed he was a political appointee and proud of it.

I told him.

He shook his head. "You got the wrong nut shop. Nobody's been brought in here all day."

"Maybe there's another door."

He scowled. "Wise guy, huh? Listen: they cart 'em in past me or not at all."

"Okay, bub—I just asked." I turned and walked out. It wasn't that I doubted him. I just couldn't dope it. Or maybe it was my inferiority complex.

I crossed the street to a one-arm and got a cup of coffee. I sat there nursing it—thinking. Fine thing. I'd been hired by a nice guy to do a job. The guy had given me money and everything. He'd asked me to find a girl. Not unreasonable whatever way you looked at it. Now I'd have to go back to him and report: look—I'm not making any progress. In fact I'm going backwards. I just lost the girl's mother.

I was damned if I would. I went out and got into the roadster and kited north. There were some men I had to see, and the first on my list was Dr. William.

THE RED brick apartment building was still there. That hadn't disappeared. I passed it on the way to the address I remembered from the yellow card—Kinder's address. The doc had a second-floor walkup about six blocks away. There were worn gold letters on his window. I went up and found the waiting-room door unlocked. Inside were an old cane lounge, a few ancient magazines, and a sign on an inner door: *Back in an hour*. I tried the inner door. It was locked.

The outer door opened and a mousey little woman came in. She gave me a mousey smile and asked in a squeaky voice, "You wanted to see the doctor?"

I nodded.

"He should be back any minute. I work in the insurance office next door and kind of look after things for him. He got a call over two hours ago, so he should be back soon."

"It isn't important that I wait, if I can just talk to him. Maybe I can call him at the place he went. Did he leave a phone number?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"An address?"

The woman evidently didn't want Doc Kinder to lose any business. She tried to cooperate. "No, but it was somewhere on Weber Place. Not very far away. I'm sure if you'll just wait—"

I registered a little doubt. "It's a business matter. I may not even have the right man. The Kinder I'm after is very short. He wears a black Van Dyke beard—"

This was a disappointment to the

girl. "No. Doctor Kinder is over six feet. He has white hair—no beard."

"Then I've made a mistake. Sorry." I got out as soon as I could and headed for Weber Place. It was dusk now, and the street lights had been turned on. I parked in front of 1125 and stood for a minute looking up at the building.

There's an old set of instructions about how to find a lost cow. You walk out of the barn, figure you're a cow, and decide where you'd go if you wanted to get lost. I twisted it around a little. I figured I was a doctor walking into the building, and tried to dope out the procedure of anyone who might want me to get lost.

Tracing back, it added up this way. There had been some very fast work by some very fast people. I'd called a doctor these people didn't want to show up. But when Kinder walked into the building, how could they have known who he was and where he was going? There could have been only one way and I went upstairs to verify it.

I LET MYSELF into the Burdette apartment with a piece of celluloid on my key ring. The place was still, lonely, deserted. After making sure of that, I started looking for the bug. It didn't take long to find it. The mike was fastened underneath the telephone table. The wire went down the table leg and out the same hole as the phone wires at the baseboard.

I went back to the front door and checked the layout. The doctor had been taken inside the building or out in the street. Nerve was required in either case, but an inside job looked to me to be the safest. The doc hadn't rung the bell—something I had a right to figure he'd do—so that meant he'd been nailed in the outer lobby. Then he'd either been taken back outside

to a waiting car, or been brought in.

The presence of the bug made me favor the latter, but I wasn't ready to barge ahead yet. There was something else that needed thinking out, so I leaned against the lobby wall and tried to puzzle it through.

When I'd first entered Mrs. Burdette's bedroom she'd been staring down at a box with a naked doll in it. I'd been bopped, and when I'd come to I'd found a doll with a dress on. Evidently something of importance hinged on the doll. Then why hadn't my slugger walked away with the whole thing? Why put a dress on a doll and leave it there?

Obviously the bopper felt it couldn't be removed safely. Why? Because it would be missed. Someone else knew it was there and the scene shouldn't be changed. So the guy who slugged me put a dress on the doll.

He did? Like hell! There'd been something else in that box. The doll had been substituted. Obviously, some person or persons unknown had been in the apartment when I'd arrived. I'd been slugged to keep me from seeing what was in the doll box. Maybe I'd interrupted the switching of the contents.

Anyhow, they probably hadn't expected me to turn up, hadn't known who I was, and had kept one foot on base, waiting to see which way I'd jump. I called a doctor which, from their point of view, was evidently the wrong thing to do, so they moved fast. They snatched the doc, sent in their own character who had called their musclemen, and they'd staged a kidnapping right under my big fat nose.

All of which was pretty disgusting from my point of view. Nick Saturday—private eye! It was amazing how I could figure things out after

it was too late. But at least I could take it from there.

I went inside and looked things over. The inner lobby fed into a long hallway pointing straight to the rear of the building. It was lined with doors. I walked down the hall. Any one of those apartments could have been the rat's nest I was looking for. But maybe there was a way to narrow it down.

I counted six doors on the right side. Allowing for the elevator, that should have put me directly under the Burdette apartment. The logical spot from which to bug the place.

A CARD on the door panel said, *Winona Keating*. I punched the button. It buzzed inside but didn't bring any footsteps. I buzzed again. Obviously the buzzer wasn't going to bring any footsteps. I leaned against the wall and debated my future. If I snicked the lock and entered, the state could shorten my time of liberty by quite a stretch. Or I might get away with it.

I had never been in jail. I had four convictions to go before they could make it permanent. I tried the knob, pushed back the bolt with my celluloid jimmy, and gave the door a shove.

The lights were on but no one seemed to be around. I stood on the threshold waiting for the silence to break. It didn't. But this was the place I wanted. From the doorway, I could see a pair of earphones lying beside a small recorder. And on the floor beside them was a box containing a big doll wearing a fluffy blue dress.

I went inside and pushed the door shut. At one end of the room an archway showed a small kitchen, complete with refrigerator, stove and sink. I moved in that direction, for no other reason than the necessity of moving

somewhere. I began opening doors. The pantry-closets. Nothing of interest. I'd just opened the ice box and gotten a chill, when a phone jangled in the living room.

I closed the refrigerator and stood there wondering whether or not to answer it. It rang again. Two long rings—then a third—and I was turning toward the living room, when someone beat me to it. A door beyond range of my vision opened and a blonde—a very annoyed blonde—came from the bedroom.

She'd evidently just stepped out of the bathtub. She wore a bath towel around her waist and nothing else. And she was angry. She snatched up the phone and barked hello with marked hostility. Then the party at the other end must have identified himself, because she sneered, "Oh, it's you! Good Lord! Can't a girl take a bath? Doorbells ring—phones ring!"

From there out I heard one side of the conversation from which I tried to fill in the other half: "I don't know. I didn't answer it. A peddler probably.... I don't know what you're worried about. Everything went off all right.... The Sanatorium, of course.... What made you think you'd find him here? You might try the club...." The pause was longer this time. It ended when the girl said, "It's in the refrigerator. And I want it gotten out of here. You can send it along with the next load.... Two more, I think, but if we can't get them we'll ship without them.... Look—I'm wet—I'm getting cold.... What?.... The two are named Maizie King and Jenny Davis.... At the club... Tonight.... Goodbye."

She slammed up the phone, still frowning, and went back as she'd come, whipping off the towel as she vanished through the bedroom door.

She didn't close it, though, and I

became conscious of the sound of running water in the bathroom beyond. I stood there watching the door. As long as it remained open I had no chance of getting out unobserved. I could see into the bathroom from where I stood. The girl was towelling herself vigorously now, and her anger had not subsided. Scowling darkly, she stood with her feet braced—far apart—and sawed the towel across her back. I waited, wondering why she had to stand full face. While she did so I was helpless unless I wanted to be turned up and, as yet, I didn't. Then, as though obeying my unspoken wish, she dropped the towel, turned and began washing the ring off the bathtub. Three long steps and I had my hand on the refrigerator door.

I OPENED it slowly, to muffle the snap of the lock. It seemed an hour before the door was clear and I could pull it open. A light flashed on inside and I remember hoping the door shielded it from the living room. Then I forgot about the door, the living room, the blonde—everything else—except what I saw lying on the shelf.

I knew instantly that it couldn't have been a doll, although it would have fit perfectly into the box out by the telephone table. I went cold all over, and even if a gun had been pointed at my head I couldn't have taken my eyes off the girl in the refrigerator.

I reached out and touched the body—the perfect little two-foot body—with one finger. The flesh was cold, but soft, yielding, and human. She lay on her back, her little arms straight down her sides. The red hair was perfect, in miniature, as was the face and the exquisite body. All my mental processes had stopped, except an idle flow of consciousness that, I

guess, doesn't stop under any circumstances. And I thought: Nick Saturday. A fine private eye. Even when he locates a party it can't be normal. When he finds the girl, she's only two feet high and she's lying unconscious in somebody's ice box.

Then some semblance of sanity returned to tell me this wasn't Helen Burdette, even though the face and hair perfectly matched the picture on Mrs. Burdette's dresser signed "Helen, with love".

This was a doll. One of those new dolls with skin that looks human—feels human. They're very clever about things like that these days. But all the time I knew it wasn't true. The flesh was *real*. And even if such perfect imitation was possible, no one would make a doll with every bodily detail meticulously copied. There is a point beyond which such duplication does not go.

I laid my hand on the flesh. Every sense I possessed told me the hand was lying on the body of a cold, unconscious, naked girl. I drew it back, shuddering.

THE CLICK of high heels from the bedroom brought me out of it. I closed the door. The lock snapped. The clicking of the heels stopped also.

"Who's there? Who's out there?"

I slid along the wall and stoop with my back pressed hard against the stucco paint job just inside the archway. The blonde didn't make any further inquiries. Instead, the heels clicked across the bedroom, sounded softly on the living room carpet, and then she breezed past me into the kitchenette.

She'd changed the towel for a pair of pink panties, and she had on sheer nylons held up by garters, but she still hadn't done anything about the

upper expanses. She turned and saw me.

I couldn't think of anything original to say, so I said "Good evening," and got set for whatever might come my way.

"Who the hell are you?"

"The name is Nick Saturday."

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm in a pretty shoddy business. I go a lot of places I'm not supposed to—like into people's ice boxes."

I kept waiting for her to realize how she was dressed—or rather, wasn't dressed—and to do something about it. At least fold her arms. But she evidently had more important things to worry about. Quick fear washed across her face. I could tell that she had a fast mind and that it was probably going faster than it had ever gone before. I could almost see various plans of procedure flash into her consciousness and then go into discard.

Suddenly she smiled. "Well, as long as you're here I guess there's nothing I can do about it. Do you mind if I get some clothes on—or did you have other plans?"

It was amazing how pleasantly curved that previously sullen mouth could become. Surprising how she could take six simple words and give them such a tone of happy anticipation.

"You'd better get some clothes on," I said.

She pouted prettily. "If you say so." She walked past me with a side-long glance calculated to melt me down and bog me in my own tallow.

It almost did, but not quite. I came out of it just as she disappeared into the bedroom. I dived after her. I can move fast, once I make up my plodding mind, and I moved just fast enough to clamp a hand over her wrist as she dragged an automatic out of her dressing-table drawer.

"You son-of-a-bitch," she said frankly. "If you think you're going to get away with this—"

I DON'T think she expected me to stand there and let her kill me, and I made industrious efforts to keep her from doing it. As I grabbed, I wished she'd had clothes on. Her nakedness put me at a disadvantage. I'd had a Christian upbringing, and this made for a certain restraint where a nude girl was concerned.

But Christianity doesn't teach suicide, and the girl meant business. It was no time to be a gentleman, so I took hold of her.

She didn't play fair. She fought like a man until she found it didn't help. Then she began fighting like a woman. She said, "Take your hands off me! Haven't you got any decency?"

"Just as much as the next lad, baby, but survival comes first."

Now she played a really low-down, dirty trick. Suddenly she went limp in my arms and a peculiar light dawned in her blue eyes; an odd expression came to her face. It was an expression that—had it been other than phony—Freud could have explained because he made such things his life work. The girl's lips parted slightly; she looked up into my face as though she'd discovered something there—or something within herself—that was too overpowering to be denied.

Her eyes, her mouth, her body said that she no longer cared for anything but the demands of the moment. She twisted around. Her arms encircled my neck. Her mouth smashed against mine.

I didn't believe it, but I'm not made of stone, and it held me—held me long enough for the party who'd tiptoed into the room to get close enough for the business. I got said business across

the skull. As I went down and out, a vagrant, silly thought flashed through my mind: *Man, how that girl can kiss.*

I WAS lying on a bed in a square, white room. I was wearing slacks and an undershirt. I didn't feel like Nick Saturday or anybody else I knew, and I had the idea a great deal of time had passed since the gorgeous blonde had kissed me and sent me here—wherever *here* was. A cluster of bulbs in the center of the ceiling shot pitiless white rays down into my eyes.

I turned my head and saw the hypo punctures in my right arm below the shoulder. The arm was lumpy and purple.

But this seemed only of passing interest. The interesting thing was the guy I'd turned out to be. I wasn't Nick Saturday. I was some character I'd have to talk to and get acquainted with.

Saturday was quite a guy himself. A guy who went around and found women frozen with fear staring into doll boxes; who opened refrigerators and found cute little two-foot red-heads relaxing on ice; who chummed with blondes who wore bath towels and handed out skull-splitting kisses.

Quite a guy, but nobody at all beside this new jerk who watched the ceiling light turn into a blonde minus even the towel and thought nothing of it.

I sat up and got deathly sick. The room was on coasters and the ride was free. I hung on as we all went around a bend. Then it was over and I staggered to a dripping washbowl in the far corner and listened to the droplets intone a monotonous ditty: sucker for a sap! Sucker for a sap!

I strangled the faucet. It gurgled and spat water. Blessed stuff, water. You could gulp it down by the bucketful. You could get high on it.

I drank a bucketful and got high. The binge carried me back toward bed. Then it vanished and I really got sick. I dived for the bed and missed it. I landed on the floor and sat there with my legs crossed like an Indian brave dreaming of the Great White Father's scalp. I sat there in the middle of a square white room and crooned to myself:

"I'm Nick Saturday. I've been slugged and booted and shot full of dope. I love all mankind and I'm not very bright and I like to get along with people, but by God somebody's going to pay.

"That above all. To hell with cold little red-heads and big, hot blondes. To hell with the respect of the decent element. Somebody's going to pay."

I GOT up and went to the door and turned the knob. It didn't open. That hurt me. It meant I wasn't trusted. I was an apprentice upon whom the eye of suspicion rested. When you turn knobs, doors should open. It hurt me deeply.

But I laughed through my pain. Nick Saturday had a way with locks. That day when they mislaid the keys to Fort Knox they called in Nick and he opened the vault for them. Then he turned down the gold brick they offered him, because he knew they couldn't spare it.

Full of dope and nutty as an Old English Christmas cake.

I floated around the room, looking here and there for whatever I could find. There had to be something. Some little thing in this bare room to pick a lock with.

I found it: a nail in the moulding someone had once hung a picture on. I stood on the washbowl and pried the nail out. Then I spent some time bending it just so. It hurt my fingers

but it was a labor of love and I didn't mind.

So I took the little bent nail and opened the great big door and went out into the hall. It was a quiet, narrow hall. A nice respectable hall that shushed people like me. I refused to be shushed. Then I caught on. The hall was my friend. It said, be smart. Open your big yap and you'll get clouted. I winked at the hall, we were pals, and I wondered how things were going in Glocamora. At the same time I wondered how screwy you can get and stay perpendicular. Nick Saturday. Crazier than fourteen hatters and somebody was going to pay.

I tiptoed down the hall armed with a machine gun and a demolition bomb. I wondered if I should go back for the spiked knuckle dusters, but decided against it. I approached a partially open door and peeped craftily inside.

There was a bed and a lazy wisp of smoke rising from a cigarette held between the fingers of the man on the bed. I didn't know what his name was but I knew what he'd called himself during our last brief contact. William Kinder, M.D. Now he was lying on the bed reading a paper and taking his ease.

I stepped into the room. I looked down at the man. I said, "Good evening, you needle-chinned son-of-a-bitch. How do you want it?"

The man jerked to a sitting position, then came to his feet. The fear in his face was balm to my soul. I yelled, "On guard, you scummy freak!" and dove in to annihilate him.

I began with a bone-crushing right to his jaw. But something was wrong. It tapped lightly against his cheek and then the man with the black Van Dyke took me by the arm and sat me down on the bed and I couldn't do anything about it.

He yelled, "Tate! Cooper! Come here immediately."

It didn't take them long. They still wore the same white coats they'd used in the Weber Place kidnapping. They still looked like clean-cut, hard-working internes.

"You boys are slipping," the phony Kinder snapped. "Patients wandering around the sanatorium at will. You're slipping badly."

They were chagrined. One of them said, "I'll use straps this time. He won't bother you again."

Kinder brushed his sleeve. "See that he doesn't."

THEY CARRIED me away like an empty sack and put me back in the room. One of them said to the other, "You fool. You forgot to throw the bolt. Get the straps and tie him down. I'm going to finish my coffee."

They went out and the bolt slammed into place. I giggled and circled the room. The windows were locked and barred. Why hadn't I thought of the windows before? I opened one of them and looked out. I was only on the second floor but beyond, under a big yellow moon, was deep, dark wooded land. No houses. No use yelling. Besides, anyone who could hear was probably used to people yelling out these windows.

I heard someone giggling, but I didn't have to look to see who it was. I knew. Nick Saturday, the superman with the creampuff punch. I went back and began examining the bed. It was an interesting bed, full of possibilities. It had four solid legs. Iron legs. The legs on the bed were separate pieces—screwed on. I went to work on one set of screws. I cut my fingers and licked off the blood and maybe the blood gave me strength, because by the time footsteps sounded out in the hall, I had one loose.

The bolt outside rattled and the knob turned. I concentrated on the door. Timing did it. Timing makes champions in golf, tennis and bed-leg-swinging. I brought the iron leg back over my shoulder and stood poised. The door opened. I started my swing.

A head appeared. The guy was being cautious. He'd seen that the bed was empty and he thought I might be hanging from the chandelier waiting to throw peanuts at him.

All he saw was the iron leg coming around in an arc. He got his mouth open to scream but the leg was coming fast. It came down against his skull and kept right on going. His skull folded over it.

I PULLED him inside and searched him. He had a gun in his hip pocket. A little .32. A baby gun probably used for shooting mosquitoes off bald patient's heads. I put it in my pocket. He had a bunch of keys. I took those too. I was ready to check out.

I went into the hall. I was feeling better now. The hall didn't shush me and I didn't wink at it.

With partial sanity there came an urge to talk to the little guy with the beard. I went back to his room and peeked in. He'd finished reading the paper and was lying there looking at the ceiling with his hands behind his head. I stepped inside and said, "Yoohoo. Guess who's back."

He whirled, came to a sitting posture. I timed a right to connect with his beard just as he came perpendicular. This time it had some power. It snapped his head back and sent him down on the bed.

"One yap out of you and I'll feed you from this squirter. They'd muss you up pretty from two feet away." He wasn't a brave man, and so he did what he was told.

He lay there looking up at me with a faceful of fear. I liked that. He said, "What do you want?"

I said, "Well I'll be damned! You've been in on this game of footsie from the start, and you ask me what I want. I want some talk-talk. The answer to some questions."

He gulped and said nothing.

"I think first I want to know about a two-foot, red-headed girl in the refrigerator. And don't ask me which refrigerator. I'm in no mood."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

I guess I was a different Nick Saturday, even with part of my mind back. The old one had always given people the edge, always given the break, and maybe that's why he'd never gotten anything but a kick in the teeth. Anyhow, I grabbed little Van Dyke by the back of the head, raised my knee, and smashed his face against it.

He let out a garbled squall. I slapped him across the mouth and said, "Shush! You ain't felt nothing yet. I asked a question."

"You wouldn't understand. It's very technical."

"Try me."

"It was one—one of the reduced specimens. They are shipped to—to another place, and weight is important. So long as we have the machinery to reduce them—"

Somebody was standing behind me. Some new-found instinct told me this. And I had the sudden thought it was the party who made a career of swatting me on the skull.

I whirled around. It was the other white-coated muscleman with a sap raised high in his right hand.

I SHOT him in the belly. The .32 made a snapping noise, like an angry Pekingese. The thug's eyes wid-

ened accusingly. I wasn't playing fair. I'd had no right to turn around. I shot him again, bringing the arm down and doubling him over himself. He dropped the sap. I picked it up and slugged him. Then I pocketed the gun, grabbed Kinder by the necktie and put a lump dead center on his skull—right on the part. He slumped down and I went away from there.

Back in the hall I almost became my old self in that I didn't know quite what to do. Call the cops and have this bug's nest fumigated? How could I make my charges stand up? The only evidence I had was a pin-cushion arm, and this wasn't the only place in town that carried pins. Besides, there was a dead man down the hall. If I didn't prove my case I'd be over a barrel.

I couldn't afford that. I had too many things to do—too many people to find. Too many screwy angles to find answers for. I decided to get out of the place. But, like MacArthur, I sternly told the world I'd be back.

This was a pretty-good-sized creep-club and I certainly wouldn't be able to travel through it very long without meeting inquiry and resistance. I only hoped I could stretch my luck to the point of finding some clothes. The white slacks and undershirt weren't for the street.

I went back to the room with the three-legged bed and measured my dead jailer for size. He was as I had remembered him—about my build. I took his pants and the white shirt he wore under his white jacket. These would get me by. I started in search of an exit.

There were elevators, but I went through a door marked with a red exit sign and found a stairway. It took me to the first floor. I found a rear door, but it was big and solid, and it had a padlock on it. I didn't

have time to fuss with padlocks, so I decided to risk the front.

A large pleasant room with a sort of reception desk on one side had to be crossed. A uniformed nurse sat at the desk, reading the kind of a magazine uniformed nurses at night desks like to read. I walked toward her. She raised her head and looked me over. She didn't jump up and click her heels, nor did she yell murder rape and arson. She just looked. When I got abreast of her, she asked, "Where are you going?"

"I think you're entirely right," I said, "and don't let them tell you different." I opened the door and walked out into the dark night, glad that it was night and happy that it was dark.

I WONDERED where I was. I went to the curb and turned to look back. A plate on a cement post by the walk read: *Hillside Sanatorium for Women*. I'd suspected as much, even though I hadn't seen any women to speak of in the place.

I walked to the nearest corner and read the street sign. Henderson Street and Merrill Avenue. That didn't mean a thing. On down the line I could see brighter lights indicating a business street. I walked toward it.

A cruising cab came by before I'd gone a block and I hailed it. Somehow the look of the cab made me happy. I said, "Take me to 1125 Weber Place. I've got to pick up a doll." I didn't tell him the doll was in a refrigerator and he didn't ask me.

We got there. He pulled down the flag and said, "Two eighty-five."

That made me wonder if I had any money. I dug into the pants I was wearing and found a small wad of bills. I pulled them out without a qualm. The guy who owned them wouldn't need them. There were sev-

eral fives, some ones, and a ten. I gave the hacker a five and went into the red brick building.

It was a nice building and I was beginning to love it. It was a little like home. Regardless of what they did to me I always came back to the red brick building for more. I went inside and pushed three buzzers and somebody let me through the inner door. I went to the second floor and found the entrance I wanted. I pushed the buzzer with one hand and took my toy pistol out with the other. It made me feel big and strong and independent. So much so that when nobody answered I hit the door with my shoulder. It was as flimsy as I'd expected it to be. It snapped open with scarcely a complaint. I went in and pushed it shut after me.

SAM KANE, my favorite hacker, was lying in the middle of the floor, trussed up like a pig on the way to a Chinese market.

He'd been walloped around quite some. One eye was closed. His nose had a starboard list and the gag in his mouth was red.

I took the gag out first. He said, "Damn it all to hell. You got me in trouble."

I went after the knots. "How so?" "A couple of lugs hired my hack. They put a gun in my neck and brought me here. They wanted to know all about you. When I couldn't tell them anything, they used me for practice."

"They must have seen you on our first trip over."

"I wouldn't be surprised," he growled as he sat up and rubbed his wrists.

"What did they want to know?"

"Everything."

"How much did you remember?"

"Nothing."

"Not even that I'm a private eye?"

"I didn't know that." The grin hurt so he straightened his face. "I wasn't trying to protect you. It was just the principal of the thing—how they went about it. If they'd have offered me a five spot I'd have even told them about your old man's hernia."

"He got that fixed," I said. "Did they take anything out of the refrigerator when they left?"

"I wouldn't know. I was catching up on my sleep about that time."

I headed for the kitchen. He followed me. "Where the hell you been?"

"In a hospital. I took the dope cure." The two-foot red-head was gone. I'd figured she would be.

"What hospital? What dope cure?"

"The Hillside Sanatorium. The cure made me violent. I left a stiff, a belly-ache, and a busted skull. I sure wowed them at the Hillside."

"How about talking sense?"

"There isn't any sense to this thing, but we're going to keep on hitting it left of center until something happens."

"What do you mean *we*?"

"You and me. Us. You'd like to get your dukes on the rough-house boys, wouldn't you?"

"I wouldn't mind at all."

I didn't tell him they'd already been gotten to. I said, "We're going to split up for a while. I want you to case a place called the Regal Toy Company. That's the outfit Helen Burdette worked for."

"Who's Helen Burdette?"

"The girl I'm looking for. I'll tell you about it when I get time."

"That'll be nice. What for do I case this joint?"

"Just go over and get the lay. Come to my place in the morning and I'll have something worked out."

"Where you going in the meantime?"

"To a night club. The Frolics Cafe."

"Why?"

"To get a drink."

"You go to the toy joint. I'll go to the club and get the drink."

"It wouldn't work out right. Let's get out of here."

As we left the building I wondered where my blonde was. I wondered what she'd look like with a blouse on. I wondered what the hell this was all about. I said, "Shuck out of your jacket. I'll need it."

"What for?"

"They won't let me into the Frolics in my shirt sleeves."

Sam complied grudgingly. "You got clean shorts on? Mine's fresh from this morning."

"Don't be so bitter."

"And another thing: I know where you can find at least one of the monkeys that worked me over."

I got into the front seat of the hack beside Sam. "Where?"

"He was sore about something. Said he was going back to Timate."

"Back to where?"

"Timate was what he said."

"How do you spell it?"

"How the hell do I know? T-i-m-a-t-e I guess."

"Never heard of it. A suburb someplace?"

"You got me. Maybe it's another town."

"Did the guy talk with an accent?"

"Uh-uh. Not that I noticed."

"I thought maybe it was another country."

Sam growled, "It'd be just like the rat to skip out without his lumps. Here's the Frolics."

"Okay. Drop over in the morning."

Sam clashed his gears. "Casing a toy factory. Of all the—"

That was all I heard as I walked into the Frolics.

IT WAS a typical glitter joint with ankle-deep carpets and lots of gilt paint. On the bandstand a band of cats were combing various expressions of agony out of some finance company's instruments. I went to the bar and ordered Scotch with plain water—no ice.

I nursed it awhile, the barkeep being busy. Pretty soon he wandered over and I had him pour me another. I asked, "How about you?"

He glanced around. "I'll pour one under the bar. Drink it later."

"Okay. Jenny around?"

"Jenny who?" he asked; but not with any belligerence.

"Davis. An old friend of mine. Thought I might say hello to her. Heard she was working here."

"Can't place the name. One of the ponies, maybe."

I let it rest for a minute until he said, "Is it important?"

"Not especially. Just thought I'd ask."

"If it's worth a couple of bucks I could find out." When I didn't say anything he went on: "The dough's for the porter. Them bastards wouldn't slap your back if you was choking, 'less they got paid."

I pushed a five out of my change pile on the bar. "Whatever you can save is yours."

He took the bill and went to the end of the bar. Pretty soon a porter came by and they huddled for a minute and then the porter went away.

I waited ten or fifteen minutes. The band didn't learn anything in that length of time. They kept right on playing badly. People came and went. The bar filled and emptied. A voice behind me asked, "Were you looking for me?"

I turned. She was small, dark, and cute. She wore an orange dress and had some kind of an orange flower in

her hair. I noticed she had one blue eye and one green one. That somehow made me think of a cat—a cuddly kitten.

"I thought I might buy you a drink."

"Should I know who you are?"

"No. My name is Nick Saturday."

She regarded me solemnly. "That's an odd name. Saturday."

"It had a wowski on the end of it once. My dad changed it in honor of payday. How about the drink?"

She smiled. "A short beer. Then I've got to dress."

I was surprised. I usually don't do very well with women. She climbed on a stool beside me. I got her the beer and she sat looking at it. She said, "You must want something. I doubt if you got my name out of the phone book."

"Does a girl named Maizie King work here?"

She thought it over, decided it was safe. "Yes. Why?"

"There were two names. Hers and yours. I heard them spoken over a telephone by a blonde in a bath towel at 1125 Weber Place."

She stiffened. "What is this? A backhanded pass, or were you just born cute?"

"It was a fact, but maybe I should have suppressed it. Sorry."

"What's your line, mister?"

I thought for a moment and decided to play it straight because I couldn't think of any other way. "I'm a private detective. I've been given the job of finding a girl you probably never heard of: a girl named Helen Burdette. I heard half a phone conversation in the apartment on Weber Place. The blonde said several things. Among them was something about a shipment with two items short. It sounded a little as though she figured you and Maizie King would become

the two items to fill out the load."

THE GIRL sat for a long time staring into her beer and I decided I'd missed. That made me feel bad, because I'd read about the clever private detectives who always turned girls into panting nymphomaniacs with one glance. They never missed. Nick Saturday—he always missed.

She said, "Maizie didn't come to work tonight." Her tone was quiet, but there was something in the tone—something a trifle breathless.

"I was hoping maybe you could help me. The blonde is tied in some way with the girl I'm looking for. Anything you've got to say would be confidential and appreciated."

Another big, silent hole. Then she said, "For what it's worth to you, I was propositioned to take a trip. Well—that word *propositioned* isn't quite right. I was offered the opportunity. A two-year contract to go to a place called Timeate, or something like that."

She pronounced it Time-ate, with the long *i*. Sam's version had been like in Tiny Tim, but I was willing to bet it was one and the same place.

"You turned it down?"

"Yes. I like the town I'm in." She stopped to sip her beer, the first time she'd touched it. She said, "Maizie turned it down too—and she's not at work tonight." Then she shrugged. "But there couldn't possibly be any connection."

"Probably not. Would you mind telling me who made you the offer?"

She turned her head and laid frank, but oddly bemused eyes on my face. She seemed to be counting my battle scars. She wore a tight little smile. She said, "A girl named Helen Burdette."

The barkeep came along with the scotch bottle. He filled my glass and

said, "On the house." Then he stood looking at me hopefully. I pushed a dollar bill out. He took it and strolled away, scratching his leg just above his pants pocket.

I said, "If you'll give me Maizie King's phone number I'll give her a ring and find out if she's sick. That is, if you have it."

"I have it."

"Maybe you'd rather call yourself."

"Main 4-9206."

"Thanks."

"I've got to go now."

"When are you through?"

"Four o'clock."

"I'll be right here. Same stool if it isn't filled."

"Okay." She slid off the stool. For her, it was a slide. I watched her walk away. I visualized her as being two feet high lying in an ice box. It wasn't hard to do. In her case you only had to knock off about three feet. I went out past the hat-check girl and found a phone booth. I called Main 4-9206. There were five rings before someone answered. A female. The voice was careful. "Hello?"

"Hello." I made it tough and brusque. "What the hell's wrong? Ain't you coming to work?"

"I—I—"

"Look—there's been too many holes in the line lately. The boss says—"

"I'm sorry. I just can't make it."

"Then don't bother from here out. Want us to mail your check?"

"No—yes—yes. Mail it."

"Okay." I slammed up the receiver.

I'D HAVE bet my poke that Maizie King hadn't been the girl on the other end of my phone call. It's not hard to trip up wrongos if you're just verifying suspicions. No girl in the world would give up a job without at least a feeble attempt to hold it, even if she hated the job. It's a matter of

personal pride. The party at the other end had fallen for it before she thought—fallen for it because it achieved the end she wanted: no further inquiry from Maizie King's boss.

But if she was smart she'd check back and figure the trap, so I had to hurry. Maybe it was already too late. I went back into the booth and checked the number with information. I got an address on Pine Plaza and headed for a cab.

On the way over I got qualms. Was I handling this thing right? Maybe I should call in some law, I told myself. Sure. First I'd tell them about a man I'd killed at the Hillside Sanatorium. Then, while they were still laughing, I'd spring the one about the two-foot red-head in the refrigerator. That would either rupture them or get me the nut house instead of the pen.

I leaned forward and opened the front window. "Did you ever hear of a place called Timate, or Timateate?"

The hacker leaned back. "Huh?"

"A place called Timateate—or Timatec."

"Ub-uh."

That was that. I closed the glass, took out my .32, and counted slugs. Four. That would get me a medium-sized rabbit at seven feet. The cab pulled up in front of the Pine Plaza. I got out and pushed a bill at the hacker. He said, "Maybe it's downstatc."

"Could be. Keep the change."

There wasn't any Maizie listed on the directory. Only a Margaret. I decided the other was a nickname and checked on the door. I wouldn't have to push any buttons. I had the celluloid the phone company had put on the direction card on the Frolics telephone. It worked.

It worked upstairs, too, after I'd knocked three times. The lights were on as they usually are in furnished

apartments. The light goes with the rent. People don't give a damn.

It could have been any furnished apartment in any garden variety ant-hill. The same phony attempt at elegance.

But that didn't interest me. I'd made it too late. That was the top news. The girl I'd talked to had been smart. She'd figured back, and so the apartment was empty.

I was tired—tired as hell. I began shaking; a reaction from the dope. Then, idiotically—all of a sudden—I wondered what day it was. I hadn't asked anybody, so I didn't know. I'd been slugged early in the evening and had found my way out of the Hillside Sanatorium a little before midnight. But how many times had the earth turned?

I snapped off the light and sat down on the lounge to let the jitters pass. I wondered if Maizie had anything in the bathroom for a headache, but didn't feel like going in to look. I wondered again whether I ought to ring in police. There was the humane obligation to Mrs. Burdette. I was willing to stake all I had that she was being held at Hillside. It was the only logical place. But there hadn't been anything very logical about this affair. Suppose I went to the police and sent them after her—and found I'd guessed wrong? The feeling of the local law toward private eyes wasn't very cordial.

All I knew for sure was that four persons had disappeared; that two-foot dolls were too human to be otherwise; that someone had wanted to keep me out of circulation. I decided to let the police handle it their way—I'd handle it mine.

The phone rang.

IT WAS Sam Kane at the Frolics Cafe. He said, "Look. I came back

here hunting for you and the barkeep remembered. He rang in a little brunette babe and she gave me this number."

"What's up?"

"Something screwy. That toy factory. It's real crazy, that joint. You ought to have a look."

"Wait for me."

I went out and started looking for a cab. While I hunted, I remembered I'd had a car of my own once. I wondered where I'd left it—then remembered that too. In front of the Weber Place building. But it hadn't been there on my last visit, so somebody had taken it out of circulation. I considered having the phony Dr. Kinder hunted down as a car thief—decided it wasn't worth while. I found a cab and was dropped off in front of the Frolics. I went inside and found Sam at the bar lapping one up. He'd gotten hold of a jacket somewhere.

I asked, "What's with the toy factory?"

"If that's a toy factory I'll eat it. Everything goes in but nothing comes out."

"What goes in?"

"Well, cars mostly. Let's go over there and I'll show you—if they're still going in."

We went out and got into his hack and drove to the place. We parked across the street. It wasn't a very big building. You could have set ten of them in one block. Lights were on, but there didn't seem to be much doing.

Sam said, "I'm parked right here, casing the joint, figuring maybe I'd go over and crash in. I see three cars pull in that side entrance in a line. The door goes up—they roll in. A couple of minutes later three more cars show up—do the same thing."

"What kind?"

"New ones—light cars. No big ones. Anyhow, right on schedule, three more

show up. I begin to wonder where they're all going. But I ain't seen nothing yet. You know how many cars roll into that place in an hour? Ninety-nine crates. And none came out. Where'd they all go? That joint ain't the stadium. There ain't room for that many cars in there."

I was beginning to get discouraged. New angles piling up on me from all directions. And all the while I was getting nowhere. I said, "I think you're nuts, Sam. Unless that's an entrance to some underground subway system, you've got to be nuts."

"Maybe it is—but I'm not nuts," he said stubbornly. "What are we going to do?"

"You stay here."

I got out and went across the street. The front of the building was lined with frosted glass blocks—very modernistic. A single door in the middle. There was light coming through the frosted glass, but the door had only darkness behind it. There was no bell and knocking wouldn't have done any good.

I circled the building. The only other entrance was the big gray overhead door through which—according to Sam—ninety-nine cars had recently passed. Usually those big doors have a smaller one cut into the panel so people can go in and out without lifting a ton of metal. This one had no smaller door. And again, no bell. It looked as though the Regal Toy people liked to be left alone.

I WAS GOING to get inside that place though—I knew that. But not now. I glanced at my watch. It was four-fifteen A.M. I went back to the hack and we drove to the Frolics. I hoped Jenny Davis would wait.

She was at the bar playing with a small beer when I came in. She said, "I thought you weren't coming."

"Sorry I'm late. You ready to go?"

She smiled. "I'm not going with you. I've changed my mind."

I wasn't surprised. Women had changed their minds before so far as I was concerned. "Don't trust me, eh?"

"It's not that. Since you were here I had another visitor, Helen Burdette. I've decided to accept her offer to go to Timeate. There wasn't anything wrong at Maizie King's. Maizie decided to accept the offer too."

I knew the meaning of frustration. Nick Saturday—private eye. He went out to look for people. The people he was looking for went here and there about their business—talking to his friends—following him in and out of night clubs and apartments. But could he lay eyes on them? Hell, no. Nick Saturday evidently wasn't equipped to find a raisin in a hot cross bun.

The barkeep came by. I ordered a double Scotch and took it in one gulp. "When are you leaving?" I asked.

"Very soon now. A young man will call for me."

"Helen Burdette didn't say where she could be reached, did she?"

Jenny gazed up at me—a little fondly, I thought, in a motherly way. "No. I mentioned you were looking for her and she seemed to know all about it. She said when she's ready to see you she'll get in touch."

At that moment a handsome young man with black curly hair and a pleasant smile came up to the bar. He stopped beside Jenny. "Miss Davis?"

"Yes."

"I'm Fred Devon. Are you ready?"

"I'll get my coat." She got off the stool and held out her hand. I took it. She said, "Good-bye and—good luck."

I said good-bye and turned away and ordered another drink. When I'd gulped it down, they were gone.

I got down on my belly and crawled

across the thick carpet toward the door.

I got into the hack beside Sam. "Everything okay?" he wanted to know.

"Oh, sure—the party I'm looking for left word for me not to worry. She'll be ready to be found any day now. When the time comes, she'll let me know."

"That's swell," Sam said. "Now you can go back and park your feet on your desk and wait."

I stifled the urge to slug him. "Drive me home. I'm going to bed."

Sam yawned. "Sure. I could use some shut-eye myself."

I live in a two-room walkup about four blocks from my office. Sam pulled up in front of it and I got out of the hack. He said, "Wait a minute."

I turned around and he dropped some small change into my hand—a quarter and two dimes. "What's this for?"

"Your change. All that's left of the fifty bucks. I'm buying back my soul."

I handed it back. "Keep it. I always tip generously."

"Thanks—and how about a little something for the clouts I took?"

"I'll give you some business instead. Come around in the morning. We'll go hunting for my car."

"I dunno. Maybe you better hire a detective."

He got away before I could swing on him.

I went in and climbed the two flights to my crow's nest. All I wanted was a bed. Maybe after a few hour's sleep, I told myself, things would look better. Hell—everybody is entitled to a little sleep once in a while. Even the world's stupidest detective.

But sleep wasn't in the cards. My bed was in use. A blonde was sitting on it.

I SAID, "Miss Keating, I believe."

She was cool as an icicle in an electric blue dress above a nice expanse of nylon hose. The dress was exquisitely filled, and it occurred to me that we had a secret between us. We both knew what filled it. "How did you know my name? I don't remember mentioning it?"

"It was on the door to your apartment. I spotted it. Probably no one else would have, but you see: I'm a detective."

"That's right—I forgot."

I sat down in my only chair, facing her. "It was nice of you to drop in."

"Wasn't it? I've been waiting for two hours."

"It must be important."

"It is. I was sent around to straighten you out."

"Who sent you?"

"Let's call it the syndicate. That's a good name and it covers almost anything."

"So they think I need straightening out?"

She eyed me critically. "What do you think?"

"Maybe you've got something. Do you do it on an anvil?"

"You've been running around having a lot of fun and you think you've uncovered a lot of dastardly deeds. As a matter of fact, everything you found is quite in order."

I couldn't think of a come-back and she went on: "Let's start at the beginning. You went out hunting for Helen Burdette and went, illegally, into her mother's apartment. We could have you arrested for that."

"We weren't talking about me."

"But we wouldn't bother making a complaint. You found Mrs. Burdette in shock and decided sinister agencies were at work. The truth of the matter was that both Mrs. Burdette and Helen had just returned from Time

Eight and had gotten fouled up. Nothing serious—nothing serious at all."

The way she pronounced it, *Time Eight*, left no doubt about how it was spelled. I said, "You're going a little too fast. First, where is Time Eight? Second, how do you get back and forth?"

This gave her pause. "I can't tell you that yet. It's a little too complicated. We'll just go on the supposition that Time Eight is a place you can get fouled up coming back from. Okay?"

"If you say so."

Another pause. "Do you like my legs?"

"What if I said no?"

"I'd call you a liar. Right now please pay attention to what I'm saying. You can look at them later."

I SHOULD have gotten mad, but I was too tired—and curious. My eyes had been on her legs because my eyes were heavy and her legs were closer to the floor than her face.

She said, "The doll had nothing to do with it. It just happened to be there."

"The guy that conked me just happened to be there too, I suppose?"

"He was under orders to stay with the Burdettes until help arrived. You barged in. He felt the situation was none of your business. He slugged you."

"Sounds reasonable."

"It was reasonable. Then, while he came downstairs for orders, you woke up and called a doctor. From there on out we had to proceed as best we could. We intercepted Dr. Kinder—"

"What did you do with him?"

"Never mind—nothing sinister. Then we moved in and took Mrs. Burdette away."

"And a two-foot, living doll you put—"

She brushed it aside impatiently. "That was Helen Burdette. She hadn't orientated."

"I don't know what that means, but what I saw in your refrigerator looked dead to me."

The impatience persisted. "Helen can't die. It's an impossibility. But will you stop interrupting? I don't want to stay here all night."

"Go ahead."

"After we got Mrs. Burdette out, we were willing to call it quits—to let you alone. But no—you wouldn't have it that way. You had to come back and stick your big face into it again."

"So you slugged me again."

"What did you expect? We had no plan for taking care of you. We just put you out of circulation until we could originate a plan. But you went hog wild. You killed Cooper—"

"What did you expect?" I mimicked. "I kind of had the idea I might be fighting for my life."

"That's why we're not holding it against you. He was a nice boy and you'll have to carry it on your conscience. Luckily Tate came through all right. And Gleason got over his headache."

"That's too bad."

"Don't be so belligerent. When you walked out of the Sanatorium we were willing to call it quits again. We thought maybe you'd had enough. But not our bully boy. Back you came. So that's why I'm here."

She crossed her legs and tapped one neat foot on the floor. "Now—are all your questions answered?"

"You haven't even started."

"Let me put it another way. Would you like to be a rich man?"

"Not necessarily."

I was trying her patience, but she was holding on. "Do you see anything else around that you'd like?"

"Look, for what I lack in brilliance I make up in stubbornness. I started out to find Helen Burdette for a certain party. I'll keep on hunting until he tells me to stop."

That seemed to remind her of something. She reached down and lifted her skirt until it cleared the top of her stocking. Inside the stocking was tucked a roll of bills. She took them out and handed them to me. "There's your money. Your pants are out at the sanatorium."

I took the dough and shoved it into my pocket. "Thanks, I'll pick up the pants as soon as these need pressing."

We sat there for a few moments measuring each other with scant cordiality. Then I said, "By the way, what do you people do with dead bodies? Throw them in the ashcan?"

"You mean Cooper? We took him back to Time Eight."

"There's another thing I'm going to find out about if it will help me locate Helen Burdette. A lot of questions have got to be answered."

Winona Keating got to her feet. "All right. I'll tell her. I'll go back and report that you're incorruptible, and we'll be in touch with you." She got to her feet and stood looking down at me. "Incorruptible, but not bullet-proof."

She went to the door, opened it, and turned again. "So long. And don't call us. We'll call you."

She went out.

I went to bed.

I WOKE up at three that afternoon.

I got up and made coffee and smoked a cigarette. I was going to have to report to Mike Conlin, but what was I going to report? Almost anything I told him would be grounds for putting me away in a crazy coop. But he was my client, and private eyes are supposed to report to their

clients at fairly reasonable intervals.

I shaved and went over to report. I found Mike fixing a safety valve on the furnace. He gave me a grin and wiped the grease off his hands. "How's it coming? Long time no see."

"Nothing to tell you about, except that I haven't found your girl yet."

He had no reply. We walked up the ramp between two hot-water tanks into his apartment. There was a pot of coffee on the stove. He got a pair of cups and we sat down. Mike studied me. "You don't look so good. Tough going?"

"No worse than you'd expect."

He put down his cup. "Helen came to see me last night."

I was past being embarrassed. In fact, I'd half expected something like that. "I guess that makes a monkey out of me."

"I can't see it that way. Maybe you didn't catch up with her, but I don't think she'd have come here if you hadn't been on the trail."

"Did you ask her any questions?"

"Like which?"

"Like where she'd been? Like what happened to her mother? Like what the hell's been going on?"

"I showed an interest, but I didn't press. What about her mother?"

"She wasn't in the County."

"Helen took her away?"

"Somebody took her away."

"Helen wasn't worried. She didn't even mention her mother, so I guess everything is all right."

"She didn't tell you where she'd been?"

"Traveling," she said. "Laughed off the whole thing."

Something had been bothering me ever since Winona Keating told me that both Helen and her mother had returned from this place called Time Eight. Now I brought it up. "I wonder how the word got around that

Helen was missing—how it got into the paper."

Mike said, "As a matter of fact, it was my fault. Indirectly. I lied to you when I implied that seeing the item brought Helen back to my mind. I'd been thinking about her a lot. I called her and found she'd left her old place without leaving a forwarding address. I asked a newspaperman—a friend of mine—to check on it. Those guys are supposed to have connections. He turned up the fact that she was missing and published the item."

"I see. That explains a point."

"What point?"

"An unimportant one."

Mike didn't press it. He stared vaguely at his cigarette. "Helen was quite interested in you. She asked a lot of questions. Who you were—where you came from."

"What did you tell her?"

"Anything I could. I didn't see any harm in it."

"There was no harm. I'm not important enough to clam up on." I snubbed out my cigarette. "Well, I guess you won't be needing my services any more."

He thought that over. "I think you'd better keep at it a little while longer. Helen was worried about something. I think she may be in some kind of trouble. Maybe you can help her."

"How can I help her when I can't even find her? Everybody in town's seen her during the last twenty-four hours except me. You're wasting your money."

He grinned. But it was a bleak grin. He wasn't very happy. "Maybe she'll find you if she needs you. Anyhow, keep at it. Let me know if anything develops."

I wasn't completely stupid. I said, "Completely, do you? It would be too final." "You just don't want to let go com-

"That's about it. You're operating for me by proxy." He got to his steel feet. "I've got to get back to work. Keep in touch."

I told him I would, and went up to my office. I wasn't in any hurry to start after Helen Burdette. I figured Winona Keating hadn't been fooling when she'd said they'd get in touch with me. Everything indicated I was too hot to let alone—from their point of view, of course.

One way or another, though, I knew I had to get back at it. There were too many unanswered questions. I never liked questions without answers. I was getting awfully interested in a place called Time Eight, not to mention a few minor conundrums relative to two-foot human dolls and ninety-nine cars rolling into the Regal Toy Company. I thought it over and decided there was no time like the present. I went out and caught a cab and headed west.

I STOOD across the street from the alleged toy factory trying to figure out if there was anything unusual about it. I decided there wasn't. I crossed the street and went in the front door. I found a small, luxurious waiting room with a pretty girl sitting beside a PBX board and behind a desk. The walls were restful green, the chairs luxurious. A man with a briefcase—probably a salesman—was nodding in one of the chairs.

I went to the reception desk and said, "I want to see Winona Keating."

The girl seemed puzzled. She studied me vaguely and then opened a directory book at her elbow. "I'm sorry, we have no Winona Keating with us. Are you sure you have the name right?"

"How about Helen Burdette?"

She didn't have to look in the book.

"No one by that name, either."

I said, "Look, honey—I'm tired of the runaround. I've decided to find out what I want to know, or make a fool out of myself. I want to see either or both of the ladies I've named. If I don't see them pretty quick, I'll get the police and come back and we'll check your records together. Is that clear?"

The girl seemed genuinely distressed. She stared at me as though wondering whether or not it would be worth while to appeal to my common sense. She decided not, got up from her chair and said, "Pardon me for a moment—please." She went out through a rear door.

I stood by the desk waiting. I didn't know quite what to do so I did nothing, although I realized I'd probably flubbed it again. The girl had no doubt gone to warn my quarry. Even now they were probably kiting it out the back door.

The salesman had perked up. He regarded me with interest for a moment or two, then picked up his briefcase and put it across his knees as though he figured I had designs on it.

The girl came back. She said, "Take him to Transfer Three." She wasn't speaking to me. She was talking to the man with the briefcase.

He had a gun in his hand now. He got up and came up close and put the gun into my back. He said, "Okay, buster. No trouble now. Let's go." As he spoke, he expertly frisked me and lifted the .32 from my hip pocket. He grinned at it. "My—aren't we tough? Come on. Move."

We went through the rear door into a hall running at right angles. He nudged me and I turned left. We walked single file for perhaps fifty feet. Then I stopped suddenly, waited a split second, and brought my el-

bow up sharply into the pit of the man's stomach.

He grunted in pain, doubled over, and I had my hand on his gun wrist. I twisted it back and found he'd be pretty easy to handle.

But he yelled. Before I could put him out of commission he let out a honey of a yelp—twice repeated—that must have carried all over the building.

THINGS BEGAN happening fast then. Three doors opened onto the hall and three huskies appeared—so quickly it seemed they must have been crouching behind the doors waiting for the yell.

I was blocked off at both ends. The closest door—my only possible exit—was about ten feet away. I dived for it, not waiting to pick up the fallen gun. They were coming so fast I wouldn't have had time anyhow.

I went through the doorway—fast—and fell down a flight of stairs. A landing stopped me. By the time I was on my feet my lead pursuer was there, reaching for me. A glass chin.

The stairs began spiralling from that first landing. I kited downward. No one chased me. The remaining two bully boys stopped up above and began yelling. I speeded up, trying to reach bottom before a reception committee formed down there.

I couldn't see much from where I was—not that it wasn't there to be seen. I was just spinning around too fast. What I did see appeared to be a huge store house, and it was certainly full of a number of things. Bright new automobiles, shiny chrome bathroom fixtures, refrigerators, wooden crates, steel crates, paper crates, modernistic furniture, antique furniture, overstuffed furniture. But no toys that I could see.

A single character was waiting at

the foot of the staircase to dispute my passage. I won the dispute with a kick in the stomach and a straight right and went on my way. I ran along the wall until I could see that I'd end up in a blind alley. Fortunately, I found another door before this happened, went through it, and ran down another corridor. This formed a T at the far end. I turned left and went through a door at the end of the cross corridor. Once beyond it I stopped dead in my tracks—pursuit forgotten—my danger forgotten—everything forgotten—washed from my mind by the sight before me.

I stood in a stainless steel room. Near one wall of this room was a vat of shining metal: tub in which fluid bubbled and boiled. The fluid had all the appearance of molten metal, but I didn't study it too closely. There were other things of greater interest.

Hanging over the vat from two metal arms was the body of a naked girl. She appeared to be unconscious, possibly from the fumes rising from the vat.

And as I watched, she grew smaller—shrank before my eyes, into a two-foot, lovely, red-headed doll.

The wall beyond the vat was made up, mainly, of a heavy glass panel. Beyond this, a man in a white coat manipulated two steel arms that obviously controlled the ones from which the girl was suspended. He worked entirely with his thumbs and a finger of each hand, and his concentration was such that he did not appear to even see me.

The door behind me opened. I started to turn, but my reflexes were bad. I'd been paying too much attention to unimportant things—things like a vat of lava, a shrinking girl, a man with a tense, perspiring face.

When the sap came down on my head it was like old times.

I CAME TO—but not completely. It was, rather, like entering a dream state. I was partially aware of what was going on, but could do nothing about it. It seemed that I too was hanging in space, supported by two rods. There was something resembling great heat, but not entirely the same. This heat seemed of a penetrating variety that worked more on the nerves than on the flesh. I felt as though I'd been skewered on a million hot wires.

Then there was a flame of color piercing my eyelids—all the colors of the spectrum. This lasted for approximately seventeen centuries, during which time I tried to regain my senses and achieve muscular control. I did neither.

Now I was lifted from the hooks and carried lightly—as though by giants. After a while they laid me down. I heard retreating footsteps—a door closing—a sound as of many bolts slipping into place.

I managed to open my eyes.

I lay on a table in a small, square room of bright metal. The table had a foam-rubber mattress of some sort and was not uncomfortable. I was somehow reminded of the steam room of a Turkish bath. I lifted my head and shoulders from the table.

Then the strength went out of me as invisible bolts of power hit me hard—sapped my strength—burrowed into my flesh, my bones—drained me.

I opened my eyes. The room was getting smaller—smaller—closing in on me. Then a thousand rainbows split into atoms and I dropped out of the parade.

I WAS LYING on a lounge in a strange room. It was huge, luxurious, with sunlight blazing in high windows. I blinked at the unaccustomed light and got to my feet. From the

windows came sounds of activity beyond.

I wondered whether this was reality or a dream. If a dream it had none of the illusionary qualities of such. I felt completely alive, entirely alert. And if my preceding experience had been reality, it had left no ill effects. I walked to a window and looked out.

Below was a broad, clean avenue between buildings of ancient Greek and Roman architecture. A marble boulevard, shining in the sun. A stunning conglomeration of vehicles rolled along the thoroughfare. Roman chariots drawn by spirited horses; automobiles of modern design; strange conveyances of a futuristic nature, stemming obviously from the automobiles of today, yet far ahead in beauty and efficiency.

And the people. It seemed they couldn't make up their minds what they wanted to be. There were Roman togas and flowing Greek robes in evidence. Powdered and bewigged dandies and ladies from the courts of the French kings rubbed elbows with modern business suits, sports togs, and clothing resembling nothing I'd ever seen. My mind hunted a comparison and found it in thoughts of a huge movie set.

I laughed, in the grip, suddenly, of light-headedness. Footsteps sounded. I turned.

A girl entered the room. She wore brief clothing of shining, metallic cloth. Her hair was the yellow of flowing gold and was done in a twisting, sinuous hairdo.

She carried a tray of fruit, some of it familiar. Bananas, oranges, apples. And some of strange color and shape I couldn't classify.

The girl smiled. "For your inner comfort," she said.

I ignored the tray. "What place is this?"

"Time Eight, of course."

"What is Time Eight?"

She seemed bewildered. "Why—it is this city, this country, this world. Time Eight."

"How did I get here?"

"Through the transfer, I suppose. How else?"

"I don't understand. What is the transfer?"

This confused her even more. "You mean you don't know? Weren't you asked to come here?"

There was a penetrating sound from overhead. I turned and looked out the window to see a fleet of planes fly across the sky. But here again was strangeness. Sleek and rocketlike in design, they marked a new era in air travel so far as I was concerned.

"No, I wasn't asked to come here. I don't know where *here* is."

The girl evidently wanted to help, but didn't know how to go about it. She finally indicated the fruit bowl. "Maybe something to eat would build up your strength," she said.

"I don't need my strength built up," I snapped. "I want to see whoever's in charge of this casting bureau."

"Casting bureau?"

"Never mind. Who's your boss?"

AT THIS moment a panel opened in the wall. A girl stepped through. The panel closed. The girl said, "Run along, Theresa," without looking at the girl. The latter ducked her head in quick deference, as though glad to quit the presence of a goof who didn't know what transfer meant.

The girl who had come out of the woodwork wore the same metal-cloth costume as the fruit bearer. She was prettier, though, and obviously of much higher caliber. She said, "Nick Saturday. At last we meet."

I watched the light throw gleaming bands off her red hair. I said, "We met before. In a refrigerator. You've

grown up since. You *are* Helen Burdette, *aren't* you?"

She laughed. "Yes. Won't you sit down. I'm sure you'd like some questions answered. We might as well be comfortable." She sat down on the lounge.

I stood where I was. "Why was I brought here?"

"You made known a desire to find me. Certain people assisted you."

"That's not much of an answer."

She tapped a fingernail against a white tooth, then said: "Suppose you start with more pertinent questions. We'll work back to your first one."

"All right. What do you intend to do with me?"

"That depends on you."

"Where is this place—this Time Eight? What is it?"

"It's a time cycle, almost the same as the one you came from—Time Two. You see, creation is pretty much a matter of various rates of vibration occupying the same space. Perhaps you can visualize it better by imagining there are numerous worlds functioning concurrently, each partially interlocked with the others."

I opened my mouth for another question, but she brushed it aside. "Let me tell you what you want to know," she said. "If I don't make it clear, you can ask questions later."

"Okay."

"This world you're in now is called Time Eight, even by it's own inhabitants. It's like Time Two, the one from which you came, in most respects. It is a so-called *parasite* time band, however, while your Time Two is a productive band."

"This means that we have nothing here but the natural facilities for existence. We draw on other productive time bands for everything we have. The people of Time Eight are entirely aware of this. Therefore they are

far ahead of the people of the productive bands so far as knowledge goes; are, I believe, more civilized and further advanced.

"As a matter of fact, our world population is made up entirely of immigrants. They were invited here to live. They come of their own choice."

She stopped for breath. I said, "Let's get a little more specific. Just who are you?"

HELEN BURDETTE smiled. "Up to two years ago I was just what I appeared to be—an ordinary girl working at an ordinary job in your ordinary world. Then I was contacted by the leaders of Time Eight and offered an important job in procurement. You see, the people here, under our advanced system, draw on all the productive bands for what they want. My job is to see that orders drawn on Time Two are filled. The Regal Toy Company is one of our transfer points. The apartments in the Weber Place building are for my mother, myself, and members of my organization."

"A bunch of gangsters—"

She refused to ruffle. "Not at all. But this business requires complete secrecy. Our approach to it must be practical. It functions with extreme efficiency, but at times there is a specialized situation—such as occurred when you began functioning as a private eye."

I wondered if there was mockery in the tone. "And the Hillside Sanatorium?"

"We are continually extending invitations to people of Time Two, as well as of other bands. Just now we need women in Time Eight. Many of those we invite, who agree to come, are not physically up to the ordeal of transfer. Hillside is one of the places where we build up their physical stamina."

"You mean the transfer is dangerous?"

"Very."

"How many times have you gone back and forth?"

"I've lost count."

My resentment was somewhat dulled by the courage represented here. "You must love death, baby, to court it so often. Why do you do it?"

She shrugged. "What is it called in Time Two? Patriotism—love of country? It would be hard for you to understand us here in Time Eight. We have an entirely different level of thinking. Some of our philosophies would amaze you. But there is still loyalty."

My mind snapped back to practicalities. "What's the truth about the human dolls? I found you lying in the ice-box. And that was you suspended over the vat, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Her eyes were on me with an almost amused light. "How tall do you think you are, Nick Saturday?"

"Six feet two."

"No. Height, my friend, is a matter of comparison. You were six feet-two in Time Two, and it seems to you that you haven't changed, but you have. There is a lessened molecular comparison between the two worlds. That makes Time Eight much smaller. Thus, all things, human and otherwise, have to be reduced before transfer. In Time Eight—as you are at this moment—you would fit easily into a refrigerator." She indicated the fruit bowl. "That orange would be as small as a large marble. In comparison, this is a doll-sized world."

"That's why ninety-nine cars could roll into the toy factory?"

"Yes. We have an automatic reducing unit for all inanimate objects. They are transferred quickly."

"Do you have a reducing and transfer unit on Weber Place?"

"No. My presence there in reduced

form was due to an error—an emergency which is of no great importance to you. It also was unfortunate in that it started you out on the sequence of events that ended in Cooper's death."

"The man I killed?"

"We are not holding it against you. You were, to a great extent, justified. The methods used by our organization there were—well, somewhat drastic, but that was because of inexperienced personnel who were panicked."

I ASKED, "How is your mother?" and the words sounded stilted—somehow out of place—too personal.

"Very well, thank you. She returned to Time Eight with me. She will stay here."

"That gets us back to my original question. What happens to me?"

There had been a tone of light carelessness, almost mockery, in her explanations. Now she sobered. "I don't quite know. There are several factors involved. Your case may require a major rearrangement in our system."

"Why?"

"Because you are not here after the regular manner of entry. You'd be surprised how carefully our prospective immigrants are approached, scrutinized, studied. It is by far the most exhaustive phase of our work."

"Maybe I'd like to stay for good. That would simplify things, wouldn't it?"

"Only partially. Your inclinations are only a phase of it. Perhaps you aren't emotionally and mentally fitted for this world. Perhaps you don't belong here."

"You mean everyone here belongs, beyond any doubt?"

"Oh, yes." She was watching me narrowly. "Suppose you rest now. The transfer is deceptively weakening. Tomorrow you can go before the examin-

ing board. That is, if you would care to look into the possibilities of staying."

"I think I'd like to look into them."

"Very well." She got up and moved toward the panel. It opened, seemingly having a mind of its own. "I'll come for you tomorrow. If you want anything, just ring."

THE EXAMINING board was certainly composed of a motley crew. There were two Romans right out of Caesar's cabinet. A Greek who could have palled around with Plato. An Englishman dressed like Lord Nelson. A couple of Buck Rogers' lieutenants. They asked a lot of questions. Such as:

"Mr. Saturday—if you found two dogs injured in the road—one a huge St. Bernard, and one a small Spaniel—which would you aid first?"

"I don't know. The one most badly hurt, I guess."

"If you could be either the president of the United States, or the king of ancient Egypt, which would you be?"

"Neither job appeals to me very much."

"Do you consider appetizing food as one of life's major luxuries?"

"I—I guess so."

"What was the date of the Battle of Tours?"

"I don't know."

"Emil Coue, a Frenchman, originated a phrase: 'Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better.' Do you believe it had any therapeutic value?"

"No."

"If you had a splitting headache and were handed an unmarked bottle of white pills by a friend, would you swallow one without question?"

"I—I think so. Yes—I would."

"Why do you want to live in Time Eight, Mr. Saturday?"

"It appears to be an ideal world."

"Do you think the climate of Earth has changed any in the last one hundred years?"

"No."

"Do you believe in God?"

"Yes."

"Do you expect to go to Hell for killing Revlon Cooper?"

"I don't know."

More and more of the same. One hour. Two hours. Three hours, until I got the idea they were trying to ruffle me. I refused to ruffle. I could stand it if they could.

Finally the questions came to an end. The board got up and filed from the room. The clerk, an Oriental wearing sandals and a brightly-colored Hawaiian breechclout, said, "You may return to your quarters, Mr. Saturday. You will be made aware of the board's decision."

I went back to my room and looked out the window. I paced the floor. The girl brought dinner but I couldn't eat any. I wished Helen Burdette would pay me a visit.

The more I thought of living in Time Eight, the better I liked it. It would be a little like being born again. Learning of a new world—a new life. I found myself waiting with growing impatience.

But no one came to tell me of the board's decision. Finally, I drifted off to sleep.

I WAS LYING on the cramped lounge in my office. My mouth tasted like the bottom of a cage tenanted by a very messy bird. If what I had was not a hangover, it would do until I could acquire one. I got up and went to the wash basin and looked in the mirror. It was me all right—with a four-day growth of beard, bloodshot eyes and a sense of bewilderment.

I went through the motions of shaving, then sat down behind my desk

and tried to catch up with myself. Gradually it all came back. But how could it be classified? A bad dream? No dream could be that wild. I went clear back to the beginning—when Mike Conlin had walked into my office. At the moment I honestly decided it had all been a dream.

But there was a way to check on it. I went down and knocked on Mike's door. There was no answer. I opened the door and went inside. Mike wasn't there. The rooms were very quiet. There was a feeling of desertion about them. The bedding gone. Only a bare mattress on the springs. Dust everywhere. Mike had been neat. I went down into the boiler room.

A wizened little man in greasy overalls looked up from a pipe he was working on. I had never seen him before. I said, "Where's Mike Conlin?"

He cupped his ear and said, "Eh?"

"Mike Conlin. Mike Conlin—the man that owns this building."

"Oh, him. He died quite a spell back." The man went into conference with his recollection. "About six months ago it was—maybe seven."

"Dead? What the hell you talking about?"

"You asked me, mister. I told you. Who are you, anyway?" Maybe the little guy had a right to be belligerent, but I wasn't paying any attention. He peered at me closely. "What's your name, mister? I ain't seen you around."

I said, "Look—what happened to Nick Saturday, the private investigator who had offices in this building?"

The janitor scratched his head. "Saturday—Saturday. Oh, yeah. I remember. The guy disappeared. Guess he took a powder. The police were around asking about him."

"How come his office is still there?"

"Since Mr. Conlin died the place

has been tied up. Can't rent nothing. Can't move until the courts get through with it. I dunno."

He only now realized he had been cross-examined. He resented it. "Look here, mister. Who the hell—"

I said, "Thanks," and went out into the street. I went to the corner and bought a newspaper. I looked at the date and figured. Eight months—more—almost nine. I stood there for a long time. Then I began walking.

I WALKED for twenty minutes before I had sense enough to hail a cab. I got in and said, "Hillside Sanatorium." The hacker drove about two blocks, then stopped and turned around to look at me. He said, "Hey, bud, it's none of my business. I could collect a fare but—that hospital burned down over a month ago. Big fire. You from out of town?"

I said, "Yeah, I'm from out of town. Take me to the Regal Toy Company."

"You know the address?"

I thought hard and gave him the address.

The Regal Toy Company was still there. And the reception room hadn't changed except that the phony salesman with the briefcase was missing. I asked the girl for Helen Burdette. She tapped her teeth with a pencil and told me Miss Burdette was out of town. I asked for Winona Keating.

The girl talked over an intercomm and, a few minutes later, I walked into an office and looked at a blonde girl across a big desk. I asked, "Just what is your job here?"

I tried to analyze her look. Surprise, of course, and maybe some fear, but no resentment. She said, "I am Miss Burdette's assistant."

I don't think she recognized me. We looked at each other for a long

minute. Then she said, "Is there something I can do for you?"

I said, "You've already done it."

"I don't understand."

"I just wanted to find something, or somebody, to prove that it all wasn't a dream. I know now. I'll be seeing you."

I walked out mad as a hatter. I don't know why anger was my reaction to it all. I just had an overwhelming feeling of having been pushed around too much. I had a case for the cops. A lot of it was pretty dim in my mind, but I knew this rat's nest had to be cleaned out.

TWENTY MINUTES later I came back with some law. Two uniformed men and a detective. I didn't even remember their names two minutes after I heard them. They were only law to me. Blank faces.

The detective pulled the door open and said, "I hope you know what you're doing."

I said, "At the very least you're going to have a case of exporting without a license."

"That's Federal."

"But you'll enjoy turning it up. And you're going to turn some other things up. I don't know what you'll call them."

We asked for Winona Keating. We waited. Helen Burdette came through the door.

I said, "I thought you were out of town."

She stared in wonder. "I don't understand."

"Skip it."

The detective said, "Madam, we have no legal rights here—at the moment—but I wonder if you'd object to our going through your factory?"

"Not at all," Helen Burdette replied. "This way."

She started off toward the wrong

door. I said, "No—we'll go this way," and headed for the route I'd previously taken. The law followed me. I said, "Through this hall. There's a stairway. All the loot is in the basement."

We found the stairs—and the basement. But the loot wasn't there. Nothing but a factory. Long assembly lines with girls in neat rows turning out things for kiddies. Helen Burdette said, "This is our rush season. We will run two shifts for several months. Were there some questions?"

It seemed that the Regal Toy Company made toys. At least there was no use telling the law any different. The detective looked at me as he said, "What have you got to say?"

I told him I didn't have anything to say. He scowled. "I ought to have you taken in and examined. Watch your step, or that's you're going to

land—in psycho."

I didn't say anything. I was thinking. I was thinking he was right. I'd gone off my rocker. I was in bad shape. I said, "Sorry," and shuffled toward the stairs. We went back to the reception room. The detective apologized to Helen Burdette. Then the three of them headed for the door. I turned to follow them.

Helen Burdette stepped close to me. "I'm sorry," she said, in a low voice. "The board decided against you."

I straightened up and grinned. I said, "That's okay, baby. That's just fine."

I went out into the street. The police car was pulling away. I called a cab and gave the hacker a certain street corner. As we crossed town, I wondered if Sam Kane was still on the job. I had a feeling he was.

THE END

KING OF THE CONDUCTORS

THE PECULIAR behavior of substances in the near-absolute zero region is a well-known phenomenon. The famous experiments at the University of Leiden demonstrating that lead metal behaves as if it had no resistance at all, first showed this. An electric current circulated through it persists in circulating for hours and days after the voltage impulse is removed.

Recently, this same characteristic has been found associated with the rare earth metal ruthenium. At point seven one degrees absolutely all resistance to electrical flow disappears in this metal. The platinum group metal Osmium promises to exhibit similar peculiarities.

The value of this knowledge is at present only in research and atomic theory. No practical use for it is found. But its potentialities are tremendous. For example, in many scientific experiments large amounts of electric current are required, but no conductors known can handle such amounts without fusing and melting. If conductors of lead or ruthenium, refrigerated with liquid helium, could be devised, there would be no limit to the amount of current carried.

Another possibility lies in their use as super-conductors of electric current somewhere else in the Solar System. When we eventually attain the Moon and other planets it is perfectly conceivable that we might use such metals as conductors on frigid planets. Thus a tiny wire of lead or osmium could carry thousands of amperes of electric current on Neptune or Pluto. This may seem far-fetched at the moment, but such radical ideas have a way of coming true much sooner than we ordinarily think. It's a wise idea to keep an eye on the research work at low temperatures. For from this field in particular tremendous discoveries are going to be made, especially as to the real nature of the atomic nucleus. Low-temperature research is one of the pioneer boundaries of physics today.

—Pete Boggs

THOUSAND MILE GHOSTS

by Omar Booth

IT IS NO mystery that the high-frequency waves used in television travel in straight lines and consequently reception are governed by the height of the transmitting antenna and the distance of the receiver from it. But there are some complications which enter the picture. In particular some TV observers have attained reception of programs over distances amounting to a thousand or more miles! New Yorkers have reported receiving stations in California and vice versa!

Actually this isn't really a mystery either. Early radio-set owners encountered similar cases of DX (long distance) reception which astounded them. In fact use is made of this phenomenon for sending messages half-way around the world on a tiny amount of power. The transmission of high-frequency waves over these tremendous distances is accounted for by the peculiar vagaries of our atmosphere which is far from uniform in constitution.

As everyone knows, the higher atmosphere contains layers of ionized or electrically charged gases which have the unique property of bending (and in some cases reflecting) radio waves, much as glass bends light. Consequently, those television waves emanating from the top of the antenna jump skywards only to be bent or reflected Earthwards to some point enormously distant.

Sunspot activity, weather conditions and temperature as well as geographic location, all influence the long-distance waves and account basically for some amazing performances by the gremlins of TV. At present, some records are being made of these happenings with an eye to sorting order from them.

It is known now that certain frequencies will not even penetrate the ionosphere—while others will go through readily. The radar experiments which contacted the Moon have given valuable information on this penetration. It is possible some TV waves—which are high-frequency, of course—may speed out into space. A sensitive-enough receiver on the Moon might even be able to pick them up above the background noise of interference from the sunspots!

PROJECT “TYPHOON”

by Charles Recour

THE “TYPHOON” is not the name of a storm, though it may very well cause a storm in military and strategic circles. Rather, it is a machine, a mechano-electrical brain capable of solving the most esoteric problems involving complex relationships between raiding rockets and aircraft and their interceptors. This complex electronic gadget is a maze of vacuum tubes and circuits but unlike most computers this does not deliver its answers in the form of punch marks on paper tapes. Instead it very clearly presents the problem, and the solution in terms of traces and lines and curves on oscilloscope screens much like those in a television set.

Its “peace-time” use is for designing aircraft and projectiles. It has a bank of dials which can be set to describe the aerodynamic characteristics of, say, an interceptor guided missile. Then the missile can be put through its theoretical paces, the dial settings changed and the process repeated indefinitely until, by a blend of trial and error and design, the best shape for a projectile can be determined.

Problems involving the interception of a raiding rocket by another rocket can be shown in three dimensions in a sort of illuminated “tank”, a technique anticipated in science-fiction by numerous writers who visualized similar developments. Naturally, everything is scaled and slowed down so that observation is clear and simple.

With apparatuses like “Typhoon” being developed and improved every day, it is almost impossible to report on them because they are changed so rapidly. Yesterday's computer is obsolete almost the minute it is put into operation. Yet it is informative and interesting to see what tremendous advances have been made since Vannevar Bush worked with his “differential analyzers” only a couple of decades ago. These simple machines laid the foundation for the gigantic computers of today. What will tomorrow's be like? Will they make gadgets like “Typhoon” look simple? The answer is a roaring “yes!”

**Would you like to catch up on your rest
in the warm velvety pouch of a modern
day vampire? Neither did Jerry.**

**By John Russell
Fearn**



The girl's scream brought attention — but no aid



FLIGHT OF THE VAMPIRES

THE PROPAGANDA and newspaper screamings attached to the Walters Lunar Expedition—the first determined effort by thirty men to reach the Moon—had no sooner taken on a forlorn note and the rocket ship been given up for lost, when a new and sensational happening was splashed across the front pages.

I'm a stratosphere pilot on the New York-Polar City route; my name's Jerry Dodd, my age thirty-two. I was one of the first to see the announcement. So much for that. Now to that evening edition which a lot of you have seen.

Banner headlines proclaimed: *Vampires Attack London!*

Vampires? Great Scot! Throwbacks to the old days of superstition and half-baked occultism—certainly not in tune with the keen progressive spirit of 1960 science.... Yet, here it was. Outside Stratosphere Headquarters I read the columns quickly, with growing surprise.

Then they had made off, and there followed an assortment of speculations regarding the possibility of the birds, having come from some part of Earth still unexplored. This seemed to me to be most unlikely,

since Earth is charted and mapped from Pole to Equator, and civilizations sprawl right across the planet.

Finally I came to the conclusion that somebody must have been having delusions, and went off to my favorite automat for coffee. I had hardly got started, however, before something close to panic swept the street outside.

The orderly procession of people in the summer evening light suddenly started dashing for shelter. At the same time there burst on my startled senses the sound of screaming brakes, the hoarse cries of men and women—then an avalanche of people came running in through the doorway with horror stamped on their faces.

I caught at a young fellow as he came dashing past me and forced him to halt.

"What in hell's wrong out there?" I demanded of him.

He was gulping so hard for breath I could hardly tell what he said.

"Vampires! Huge things! Birds—! Killing folks—!"

Releasing him, I fought my way through the people to the door, and somehow got out into the street. It was a staggering sight which met me. The sun had set now, but against the orange flush between the rearing piles of buildings were some thirty enormous birds with a wingspread of perhaps two hundred and fifty feet. They looked like bats and dived with terrifying velocity, wings folded, filling the air with a leathery, beating rustle that somehow had a paralyzing effect on the nerves.

In places, they had come down to the street. Even as I watched, I saw men and women lifted helplessly into the air, to be dropped back with violent force. It was the most ghastly attack I had ever witnessed.

I hurried to the nearest fallen man

and caught at him. He was pretty nearly dead, and in the back of his neck were two deep punctures about an inch across. He moved feebly in my grasp. Then, before he could utter a word, death caught up with him and he relaxed.

But I had had the time to notice that it was rather the shock he had received than actual injury which had killed him. His neck was not broken, nor had he lost overmuch blood. In fact, his only trouble seemed to be a broken ankle from the fall.

THEN ONE of the things dived for me. I had my service raygun in my belt and I fired instantly. The vicious ray lashed the monster across the belly as it swept over to within a few feet of me. To my horrified amazement, the ray glanced off. Either the creature was armor-plated, or else of a constitution impervious to earthly destructive devices.

I took the only way out to save myself—dashed for a doorway. This saved me, for the thing whizzed past once or twice with a dank, moldering odor, and then flew off to join its fellows.

The confusion increased. Corps of militia arrived with their defensive weapons and set about the flying monsters in real earnest. I joined them, since of course I am experienced in campaigning as well as being a civil pilot.

Our efforts, though none too effective, at least harrassed the things badly, with the result that they finally flew off—but not until every window around us had been broken and scores of men and women lay dead or dying in the street. Night had fallen now, too, and the scene looked doubly horrible in the pallid glare of arclights.

I straightened up at last, sweating and breathless, watched the final

monster hurtle upwards and vanish. The attack was over.

"For God's sake, what are they?" panted a gunner, beside me. I shook my head. "No idea. But I'll find out soon enough. I'm going to Headquarters to see what they think."

I made my way through the arriving fleet of ambulances, and so back to Stratosphere Headquarters. Within, I found an air of tense activity. Fellow-pilots were hurrying about everywhere, most of them in their rarely-worn battle kit, their faces grim. I went through the midst of them into the briefing room.

"What's going on?" I asked the Controlling Officer, as he studied a list of notes anxiously.

"Plenty!" he snapped back. "Those damned birds came from London. It seems they didn't return to London after flying around, but crossed the Atlantic to have a go at us! God knows where they originated. Some remote part of Earth, I suppose."

"Things like those don't belong to Earth," I told him grimly. "Unless I'm dead wrong, they've come from another world!"

He shrugged. "Well, we're taking no chances. A squadron of strato-fighters is taking off in ten minutes to search for them. They can stand raygun charges, but I think the protonic guns will put paid to them quick enough. So far, they seem to have limited themselves to attack—no kidnapping. And there won't be either if we can stop it."

"That means I go up too?" I questioned eagerly, but to my disappointment he shook his head.

"Not yet; you're too valuable on the civil line. You'll stand by for orders. Report back here in an hour."

I had to take it, of course—but it was hard to see the others ready for action and departing from me with

good-luck smiles. Finally, I wandered out of the building; then, struck with a sudden thought, I headed uptown. Might as well reassure myself that Eva was safe, anyway.

The moment I reached her apartment block, though, I saw that something was wrong. Not a window in the place had survived the onslaught of an hour before. I quickened from my leisurely pace and raced up the staircase to her apartment, rapped on the door.

"EVA! OPEN up! It's me—Jerry!"

There was no reply from within; yet I knew Eva Grant must be at home, for her evenings were spent in studying for the Advanced Science Examination she was determined to pass before we were married.

Again I hammered. Then, as I got no answer, I hurtled myself against the door and sent it flying backward on its hinges. There lay Eva on the floor of the living room, shattered glass from the window all around her, blood smearing the back of her neck under her thick dark hair.

Hauling her up in my arms I carried her to a chair. She was alive, thank God, though her pulse was feeble. Bandages and restorative brought consciousness slowly back to her. Color began to creep back into her cheeks.

Weakly she turned her head, then winced at the pain in her neck. She looked at me and smiled faintly.

"Hello... Jerry."

"You were attacked by one of those damned bird things?" I demanded, and as she nodded I hurried into the next room and snatched down a blood-test syringe—a small everyday device used by most of us for determining physical condition.

She started as the needle stabbed

her arm, then I gave a low sigh of relief as my worst fears were banished. Her blood was normal enough: no sign of venom from the thing's jaws.

"Just what happened?" I asked her, as she began to recover.

"I—I hardly remember. I heard the commotion outside so I went to the window to take a look. Then one of the birds came shooting down, smashed the window glass in pieces. I dodged the splinters, thank goodness, but it didn't avail me much. The bird came half into the room, got me by the back of the neck— Well, next thing I remember I saw you."

I clenched my fist. "If only I knew what these birds are! What they're *after*..."

"I don't think they're of this world, anyway," she said, her voice quiet. "I've studied enough science to know that. I saw the bird at close quarters, and it was covered in a black, non-light-reflecting substance, utterly invulnerable. Nature doesn't provide her creatures with a covering like that without a very good reason—and the only reason I can think of is protection against the cold of space. Just as a fish has extra bones to withstand the pressure of water."

"I guessed myself that they don't belong to Earth," I said. Then I snapped my fingers. "What about the Moon?"

"I wondered about that," she said, musing. "Their size is feasible then, since the Moon's gravity is only a sixth of the Earth's. But why they should so suddenly come to Earth like this I can't imagine. Unless," she finished slowly, "the Walters Lunar Expedition to the Moon *did* succeed after all, and furious at the invasion of their domain these creatures are trying to exact reprisal. Remember, Jerry, there are thirty birds, from all accounts—and thirty men went to

Luna. It sort of ties up, doesn't it?"

IT WAS AS good an idea as any—but it didn't make things any easier. I debated for a moment, but before I could say anything further, there came to our ears through the smashed window that already grimly familiar sound of leathery beating and the whistle of cleaved air.

"They're coming back!" Eva gasped hoarsely, leaping up from her chair, and at the same moment there came a miscellany of screams and shouts from the street below.

But I was not concerned with this: my gaze was directed to the window as bird after bird came hurtling from the heights. As though driven by some inexplicable instinct, one of them dived and twisted abruptly, hurtling straight for the shattered window. It came with such demoniac force it knocked me flying—but at least I had the time to see it.

It certainly resembled the old-time pterodactyl. There was the same evil head, the merciless scar of beak, the beady, heavily filmed eyes, as though for extra strong protection. The wing-spread, huge though it was, was handled with easy grace.

So much I had time to note, then I was struggling with the thing for all I was worth. Firing my useless gun at it, I strove to prevent its settling on the fighting, screaming Eva—but again that steel-hard casing it possessed defeated all my efforts. Right before my eyes Eva was lifted in the thing's jaws and borne swiftly towards the window.

I made one last desperate effort to save her, but a beating wing struck me with such force I went spinning six feet away and crashed half senseless against the wall. By the time I had recovered my balance and wits, Eva had gone, nor could I see any

sign of her by the time I had rushed to the window.

In the street below there was pandemonium as several of the men and women not yet removed from the earlier attack were picked up and carried aloft like children seized by giant eagles. In all there were probably thirty of the monsters once again, and they gathered together almost like plane squadrons, carrying a man or woman each, and heading for the night sky.

By the time I had blundered distractedly downstairs to the street, there were few of them left. The defense guns were rattling again just as futilely as before. I didn't even stop to watch them. At top speed I raced to Stratosphere Headquarters and hurried in to the Controlling Officer.

"I've got to go up and help settle these damned things!" I told him. "They stole my fiancée not two minutes ago and—"

"Hop to it," he ordered briefly. "We want every man we can get right now. We were going to send for you anyway. Squadron K—Action Station Nine."

I nodded and raced out.

WITHIN ten minutes desperation had hurled me into the air with all engines going the limit. I felt that there might be a chance even yet to overtake the flying horrors, since I reckoned that their speed would slow down as they reached the stratosphere, loaded as they were too.

In this I was partly right. As I climbed I saw a group of them against the full moonlight. By this time New York was a mere segment of spotted light infinitely far below me. Instantly I broke from my squadron and went streaking across the sky after them.

They saw me, headed for the greater heights. I was after them immediately, climbing, climbing, with the motors thundering a steady, effortless song. But one thing puzzled me now. These birds no longer carried human beings in their jaws!

Two horrible thoughts flashed upon me. Had they *dropped* their captives, or was this another flock of birds entirely? Well, what did it matter now? Attack them anyway and trust to the rest of the boys to get whatever others there might be.

The moment I got near enough I opened up with my protonic guns. They shied! One actually blew to pieces, and that brought a hard grin of satisfaction to my face. At last I had a weapon they couldn't stand. Sheer energy biting into their filthy bodies was more than they could tolerate, evidently.

The fate of this one, however, warned the others. To my amazement they suddenly folded their wings into their bodies and rose higher and higher with increasing swiftness! How they did it I could not imagine—and it was tragic too from my own point of view. There were definite limits to which my plane could ascend, and to go much higher would mean going beyond the atmosphere altogether.

Then, apparently annoyed by my pursuit, one of them deliberately stalled and waited, poised uncannily in space. I could not slow myself down in time, with the result that I hurtled straight at it. Instinctively, I dove out of my chair, and it was this which saved me, for the creature came smashing through the observation dome amid a shower of splinters.

Instantly, the frightful cold of these great heights surged into my cabin. I would certainly have died, but for the protection of my stratomask and kit. I half knelt by the wall, clawing

at the driving, battering mass of shell-encrusted leather overwhelming me. It mastered me in a few seconds, whirled me about, then tore the helmet from its studs at the back of my neck.

Savage pain went through the length of my body; then I must have fainted. . . .

I RETURNED to consciousness aware of the most inexplicable sensation. Beyond having a stiff neck I was sublimely comfortable! I seemed to be lying in the midst of a feather bed, and every weight and pressure of normal existence had gone from me. I had air, warmth, and ease beyond all parallel. From those last conscious moments of horror to this paradise demanded a good deal of puzzled thinking.

When I had sorted things out, I got the shock of my life. I was lying in a kind of pouch, softly hair-lined, and composed of rubberlike skin. One section of this skin was slightly transparent, and through it I gazed upon the incredible vision of space itself—something I had never seen before.

Stars by the quadrillion; a Sun girdled with prominences; a Moon at the full and already swollen beyond normal dimensions, growing so fast I could see the shadows on the slight right-hand edge of the approaching wane.

As I took this in, incredulously enough, my eyes moved on to a flock of birds, wings tight-pressed to their sides, speeding in straight-line formation through the gulf. I counted thirty-eight of them altogether. On the nearer ones I beheld a bulging pouch after the fashion of a kangaroo.

Now I understood! Their jaws had been empty because the captives had gone into the pouches. I was inside the thing that had attacked me, then. Being carried without harm.

From vague revulsion my emotion changed to wonder at this marvel of Nature defeating the void of space, yet keeping me safe; Air, I discovered, was entering from a natural sac at one end of the pouch and being expelled by the action of a steadily working muscle and natural vent at the other. Surely Nature in all her varied moods had never created so outlandish a creature as this!

But the *reason* for it all? I fingered my neck. Blood had dried there. Why hadn't I been killed? Then it became obvious to me as the Moon increased in size that there was our destination—and at a gigantic speed, too.

THE MORE I studied the birds the more I could see a faint stream of energy being projected from their tails. I think I guessed right in assuming that they utilized the radiations of space as an ordinary bird utilizes air, pushing against its different densities and cleaving through it, given just the right energy wavelength by Nature to expel against it and hurtle them forward. Obviously they could live either in air or out of it: the air I was receiving had evidently been stored somewhere and was now being released for my especial benefit.

And at the end of the journey? That was a grim thought. The more I pondered the more sure I felt that this was an act of vengeance for the desecration of their domain by the Walters Lunar Expedition. If so, then I was resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible. I still had my raygun, anyway. Rather than fall victim to a lot of educated pterodactyls, I'd turn it on myself.

At intervals I slept in curiously drowsy contentment, an effect undoubtedly engendered by my cosy position and lack of restricting gravity. I believe the birds absorbed nourishment from the void somehow, prob-

ably using the very medium against which they thrust, or else they absorbed radiations unimaginable to a flesh and blood Earthman.

And each time I awoke the Moon was larger and had waned further—until finally we were dropping in perfect formation down to its powdery, blinding white surface.

Craters, glaring mountain ranges, dead sea bottoms—all reared up towards us at alarming speed. Trained as I was to maneuvering a plane, it seemed to me that a crash was inevitable—but at the last second, with easy grace, the whole flock swept over the nearest mountains and dove down into the depths of an extinct crater.

The sunlight snuffed out as though it had never been. We were plunging through abysmal, airless shadows into the very depths of the Moon. The darkness was so intense after the glare outside, I was almost blinded.

Then after a while it began to lighten. From somewhere below a deep pinkish light swelled into rosy glow. It lighted towering canyons, the pumicelike escarpments of this honey-combed satellite, until finally we broke free and landed in a vast central area which I judged must be the approximate core of the Moon. And here, unsupported as far as I could tell, blazed a circular red ball illuminating the colossal cavern from end to end. Judging from the soft shadows there was air here, of sorts.

SOMETHING pushed me—muscles I think—and I was “ejected” from the bird’s pouch like a pea popped from a pod. I got to my feet, balancing with some difficulty against the lesser gravitation. Obviously we were not exactly at the Moon’s core, else the gravity would have been equal on all sides and I’d have been in mid-air.

That blazing ball, as far as I could judge, was some sort of radioactive material—possibly even one of the last natural energy minerals left in the Moon. But how it hung there without support I just couldn’t imagine.

Then, as I got over the eye-wrenching dimensions of the cavern and drew comparatively fresh air into my lungs, I looked anxiously round on my fellow-travelers. They too had been ejected—thirty of them—and among them, pale but unharmed, was Eva!

I rushed over to her right away and caught her arm.

“Eva! Thank God you’re safe!”

“Looks as if the guess about the Selenites was right,” she commented after a moment, looking round. “But what the idea is I’ll be hanged if I know.”

Evidently we were soon to find out for, waddling forward in penguin-style on their queer feet, the birds forced us, by no means roughly, to advance along the cavern floor. They did it by prodding us with their beaks, and when we showed reluctance they merely pushed the harder, without resorting to the terrible force they could have used had they wished. This at last seemed a hopeful sign. But back of my mind was the remembrance of the carnage and destruction they had caused back on Earth. Probably we were being led to the slaughter.

We advanced perhaps a mile, and in that time the red ball seemingly so near at hand came no closer to us. I was puzzling over it when Eva seemed to solve the problem.

“It must actually be enormously big and a long distance away, situated at the exact central core of the Moon. Therefore, it needs no support because gravity is pulling equally on all sides.

It's probably the final unburned-out core, and forms a sun of this inner world. I suppose that's the explanation."

WE STOPPED suddenly on the edge of a long, sloping incline. Down at the base of it, three hundred feet perhaps, was the real floor of the Moon's core. More than that: there was a city of sorts. It looked utterly crazy from Earth standards because it was composed of walls without roofs! There wasn't a roof anywhere. But there was a definite impression of order, and everything was built to an obvious plan.

"Why, it's a—a nest-city!" Eva ejaculated, gazing down. "The Selenites must enter their homes through the roof—just as an Earth bird gets into its nest!"

I nodded as we gazed in wonder. The rest of the people gathered doubting and anxious about us. Then I directed my attention to something standing apart from the mass of square, roofless buildings. It was a tapering obelisk with a kind of platform at the top. Upon this, fastened down with massive cables, was a sadly battered and travel-stained rocket ship!

"The Walters Expedition machine!" I cried, pointing to it.

"And no sign of the thirty men who went in it," Eva said, with ominous quietness. "And there are thirty of us here, too! It begins to look pretty bad—"

She couldn't get any further for the Selenites pushed us forward again. We were forced to hurry down the sloping cavern side with them behind us—and the nearer we came to the roofless houses the more we could see how large they really were.

We were driven past most of them, but here and there we did catch

glimpses that showed these weird creatures were anything but limited to a bird's intelligence. There were many baffling machines in some of the buildings, queerly fashioned for ornithic instead of human appendages.

AND SO FINALLY we were seized and lifted over the high wall of one of the largest buildings of all—set gently on our feet. Here I felt horror grip me completely....

The place was pretty well crowded with birdmen of varying sizes. Some were quite small and less like birds than those which had brought us hither, nor had they any sacs, so presumably they were of a different species. More, they had rudimentary forearms supplied with a humanlike hand. Most of them seemed to be busy with a variety of instruments.

But it was not this that horrified me. It was the sight of thirty Earthmen, motionless and deathly white, strapped to thirty immaculately clean tables! Every member of the Walters Lunar Expedition was there, from Commander Walters himself to the lowliest rocket-hand. Strapped down, at the mercy of these abominable things of a near-dead world....

"What—what are they going to do?" Eva whispered, her startled eyes turning to me.

I glanced about me at the drawn faces of the others, then at the impregnable lofty walls. Certainly there was no retreat, for there were no doors. The only chance of escape, and that none too certain, lay in getting over the towering walls around us, but, on this I had little time to speculate, for Eva's horrified gasp snapped me back to studying the scene confronting us.

Others of the Selenite scientists had come into the long operating theater now, pushing rubber-wheeled stretch-

ers before them. And there were thirty of them! Straps were dangling from them in readiness for—? Nothing could have been more significant! They were meant for us!

We all shifted uneasily, but we couldn't move far for the waiting flying Selenites were immediately back of us, prodded us with their beaks if we moved too far. So we were forced to watch the ghastly business.

To each pinioned Expedition man's table there was run alongside a vacant trestled stretcher. Between stretcher and table was placed a machine which bristled cables and pumps. It looked rather like one of those old-time ticker-tape machines.

Once this was done, in all thirty cases, the chief operating surgeon made a signal. One of our party, a man, was seized and forced across the floor, fighting and screaming at the top of his strength. Ultimately, as the rest of us watched in quaking anticipation, he was forced down on the furthest stretcher and strapped into place. Delicate needles in the claw hands of one of the surgeons began to probe the back of his neck as he yelled and screamed.

THIS WAS getting too much! My rising fear began to spill over when one after another of our party was seized and similarly treated. Any moment now it would be the turn of Eva, and then me! But not if I could help it!

I ran my eyes quickly along the wall surrounding us. We had only a sixth of Earth's gravity to defeat. If we could get away in one flying leap we might— Then what? No space ship. Yes, there was one—the one on the pedestal! If only we could get to it, we could perhaps...

I confided my notions to Eva in

whispers as she watched the slowly dwindling line of victims. Finally she nodded and waited for my signal. I gave it when the penultimate one to her was taken and bundled over to a stretcher.

"Now!" I shouted, and then ran and leapt with all my power.

The surprise of my move helped. I never put such strength into a leap before. Up I went, sailing high over the heads of the astonished bird-surgeons until I landed on the broad top of the wall. Not a second behind me came Eva. She would have overshot the mark, being lighter than I, had I not clutched her. With hardly a moment's pause we leapt downwards to the street outside, then proceeded in gargantuan jumps towards that distant obelisk with the space machine atop it.

But we'd reckoned without the demoniac speed of those lunar birds! Inside a minute they were sweeping after us with projectile velocity. We leapt round the back of a building for protection and I snatched out my raygun, determined if we *must* be captured to give a good account of myself first.

So, covering Eva as best I could, I stood there blazing away as rapidly as I could press the button. One of the creatures I *did* damage, for I shot it through one vulnerable spot—the eye. It crashed to the street, twisting and squirming, but this did not deter the others. Again and again my ray glanced off their armor-plated bodies, until at last my gun was empty of charges and I had to throw it away.

In any case, the game was up now. Struggling savagely, we were seized in those mighty jaws, lifted into the air and borne back swiftly to the operating theater. Again it came to me with passing wonder that the

creatures didn't kill us there and then. Had they chosen to close their jaws, they could easily have cut us in half. But they didn't. Instead, they finally deposited us on the two remaining stretchers, held us down by main strength while the straps were buckled into place.

I gave up struggling because I had to. I simply lay breathing hard, my head turned sideways to watch Eva. She was looking terrified, and no wonder. The rest of our party was motionless now, as dead-faced and immobile as the members of the Walters Expedition beside whom they lay.

Finally I glared up at the bird-faced surgeon studying the ticker-tape machine beside me.

"Look here, you, what's the meaning of all this?" I demanded. "What's the explanation? We're entitled to that, aren't we?"

Not a vestige of expression showed on his weird face. I doubted if he even heard me—and certainly there were no attempts at thought-transference. He simply went on calmly with his task, which consisted of fixing a sort of cradle so that my head was forced forward slightly. It was in no wise uncomfortable, but I was desperately afraid just the same.

Then I felt something stab my neck. Almost immediately my body seemed to float away from me and I lost consciousness of my surroundings....

I DO not know how long I was senseless, but to my surprise I found myself in a quite Earthly-looking bed. The implacable bird-like scientist who had gone to work on me was there too, and in the next bed was Commander Walters himself, the man next to whom I had been lying when I had lost consciousness.

He was sitting up, even smiling slightly. I looked beyond him down an immense ward. Everybody was conscious again, talking to each other, tended by Selenites. Far away, I could see Eva, apparently none the worse.

I turned my eyes back to Walters' bronzed, amused face.

"What the devil's the idea of all this?" I exploded. Then before he could answer me I went on hurriedly: "Look, we've got to think out a way of getting back to Earth. Some hellish sort of experiment is going on! These blood-sucking vultures—"

"Nothing of the sort, man!" Walters contradicted me abruptly. "They're gallant scientists, all of them! The pterodactyl type are probably the bravest warriors of the race. They took an awful chance going to Earth as they did. Their methods must have looked like deliberate attack, I suppose—but that was not true. How many Earthlings died?" he asked me.

"Dozens, I imagine. But it *was* an attack—!"

"No," he insisted. "It was necessity! Those who died must have succumbed to shock, nothing more. The flying Selenites, fitted by Nature for space flight, are natural chemical agents. Their task was to find people whose blood quota exactly matched that of we thirty men here, of the Expedition."

I stared at him blankly. "You mean," I whispered, "that when they were making their vampirish attacks, plugging people in the neck, they were actually making blood tests?"

"Exactly. Didn't you see for yourself how marvelously their internal organs are constructed? They are living laboratories, and able to carry anything in a special pouch."

I REMEMBERED this part, and it was just commencing to dawn on me why none of us had been really hurt.

"So," Walters resumed, "when they had checked their results, they knew the exact thirty people they wanted, and the instinct of a bird—a power we do not possess since it is sixth sense—led them straight to the thirty they wanted when they decided to carry them back to the moon."

"But what in hell for?" I cried.

"To save our lives," he answered solemnly. "All thirty of us got to the Moon here, but we were badly smashed up in the doing, and we lost a good deal of blood. The Selenites—being differently constructed than we are—couldn't supply the necessary life-fluid—so they did the only thing possible and dispatched

agents to Earth to find blood-donors.

"Believe me, it has been worth it!" he finished. "The Moon, as you've seen for yourself, is not dead, and its race is very friendly towards us. We can give them much: they can give us much. The invasion of Earth was a necessary evil, but out of it will come untold benefit. You should feel proud, you and your friends, that you were chosen. You've become a bridge between worlds, and have laid the foundations of an interplanetary union."

I nodded slowly, gradually realizing the enormity of the thing that had been done. I caught Eva's eyes in the distance and knew that she realized the truth too.

Then I look up as I saw a claw-like hand extended towards me. Something like a smile was on the face of the Selenite surgeon.

THE END

MR. HEARST'S NEW BABY

by Salem Lane

WE TAKE the movies so much for granted that we rarely think of the optical miracle that permits us to freeze and capture motion on a flat screen. Photography and its associated arts are a magnificent accomplishment but even the humble projecting of the film in the regular theater requires a marvelous mechanical arrangement. Commercial film projectors are superb mechanical contrivances blended with amazing electronic controls and sound reproducers.

The latest projector is continuous; that is, the film goes through without the starting and stopping of each frame. By rotating a mirror through a tiny arc of a fraction of an inch, the film image is effectively stopped and remains stationary on the screen while actually the film is

going through the projector at a steady rate. You can imagine the saving on wear and tear of the film. In addition the image is clearer and steadier since it is purely optical instead of mechanical. This type of projector will be of particular value to television, which at present is notorious for the poor reproduction of filmed events, the fault lying not with the television camera but with the projecting apparatus. The inventor, J. R. Hearst, an acutely skilled technician, expects to see his invention in world-wide use shortly—contrary to present popular opinion all inventions are not made in super-laboratories! Science and technology seem to jump ahead in bits and pieces, just as in this relatively minor event, but oh, brother!—the accumulated results make your head swim!

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ADAM'S FIRST WIFE

By Rog Phillips

He had searched in vain for a dream girl.

He had married only to be disillusioned.

Thus he was fair game for the Succubus.

THE SUCCUBUS focused a slender streamer of awareness on the stone parapet as an anchor and coalesced about that focus, drawing in from every direction until she was localized. Since there were no mortal minds in the immediate vicinity, she materialized as herself. Thin-skinned and hairless, with the richness of her immortal bloodstream glowing through the skin in bright red. Generous ears that rose to long graceful points. Squat muscular body that would be considered deformed by the standards of man, who considered his own shape the better. Sharp eyes that looked from either side of a jointed nose which blended into a cup-shaped upper lip which in turn blended into a wide mouth relaxed in a knowing grin. A forehead that consisted of three horizontal, closely crowded wrinkles bordering a rather flat, bald top that sloped gently into a bullish neck that was really no neck at all, but only the apex of heavy

shoulder muscles.

On materializing, she dropped to the surface of the stone parapet and squatted apeline, on haunches and knuckles, her sharp eyes looking out over the valley below the mountain.

The people of the valley were asleep. But they were uninteresting. The succubus scanned them hundreds at a time and dismissed them all as not worth bothering with in their present state.

Like a fisherman who has dropped his line in a swirling pool for an exploratory moment and found nothing, the succubus vanished, and rematerialized in exactly the same spot thirteen days previous to her former moment of materialization.

Again she scanned the population of the valley, this time with greater insight into each sleeping mind, gained from knowledge of their state of mind thirteen days in the future.

Suddenly the absent-minded grin widened with anticipation. The sharp



She was the incarnation of Beauty — gaiety — Evil.

eyes studied the stone floor of the parapet speculatively. Decision crystallized within their depths. Purpose flowed from them.

And the stone floor became a rolling surface of a meadow with rich growing grass, trees bordering all sides, a lazy stream cutting across the middle, and flowers sending their fragrance into the fresh spring air.

The succubus examined her handiwork and was pleased. Now the light within the depths of her sharp eyes turned inward, thoughtfully.

Her physical form began to flow in fluid alteration, under the direction of her inner spirit. Her legs grew longer, more slender. To an observer, her entire form would have appeared out of focus and indistinct—until it settled into the shape she had willed. A shape the succubus had created from the ideal in the dreams of her anticipated prey. A woman, with all the rich contours of the secret dreams of man, and the softly welcoming smile on dreamy surrendering lips that man yearns for and seldom finds.

There was nothing illusory about any of it. A man wandering lost on the mountain and somehow undetected by the succubus, chancing upon the scene, would have seen it, would have been able to pluck the flowers. They were real, so long as the succubus willed them to exist.

The woman went to the lazy stream and looked at her reflection. Was that a lecherous gleam in the depths of her soft blue eyes? If so, it was quickly gone, and the curiosity that looked out was only that of a woman observing herself and finding herself pleasing.

There remained, now, the victim.

HE WAS a man of perhaps thirty-five years, clean-shaven, with dark brown hair that ordinarily was

neatly parted with natural waves, but which was now mussed from the uneasy tossing of his head on the pillow. His cheek twitched once every three seconds in a movement that barely lifted the skin and dropped it again. His lips were curled in bitter disillusion. He was asleep.

Beside him lay his wife, also asleep, her rather fleshy face relaxed and sagging, her lips parted. She was snoring softly. The covers over her formed a large mound which rose and fell in slow rhythm, and bespoke a body as fleshy as the flaccid face.

Her sleep was undisturbed by dreams. But not so the man's. In his dreams he was at the store where he worked. He was waiting on customers. Each customer was a female, thick and shapeless of body, sharp of voice, unreasonable to the ultimate extreme in her wants and demands.

Nearby stood a floorwalker, also a woman. She was watching him, waiting for his ragged temper to shred apart, hoping it would. If she would fire him for impertinence to the customers he would be happy. But she would never fire him. She would speak to him quietly, treat him like a child who had been naughty. She would smile at the customer. And everything would be smoothed out, leaving him feeling humiliated.

He glanced at the clock on the far wall. Ten minutes until quitting time. The women clerks would rush away, leaving for him the job of covering the counters with their graying sheets. To hurry would do no good. At the exit he would have to stand aside and smile inanely at the female clerks as they filed past him—or get elbowed out of the line by one of them, indignant at him for not being gentleman enough to wait.

"I'm asleep," he said bitterly in his dream. "Why can't I forget all

this while I sleep? Isn't it enough that I have to put up with it during the day?"

And abruptly he was walking up to the front door of his house. It wasn't over. Anna was the essence of every vindictive female customer, all rolled into one. Fat, mean-tempered, demanding. He was three minutes late, and somehow that three minutes always was a most crucial period during which food burned (his share, of course), and the sweet disposition she had had all day departed, not to return until the next morning after he had gone to work.

He hated women. He accepted that hate with hopeless resignation. They were gross and ugly, vile-mouthed and mean-eyed. They were swine in human form, resenting their incarnation out of their predestined environment, and blaming him for it—or at least avenging themselves on him for it.

There were, he knew, women who weren't that way. Anna wasn't one of them, nor were any of the customers that came to his department to buy corsets. Those women sat quietly on the bus. They could be seen in the distance buying trinkets at the jewelry counter, or wispy things at other counters.

But even they, in his thoughts, repelled him. The occasional one that passed his counter at work glanced at him pityingly if she glanced at him at all. The occasional one he sat beside on the bus usually looked up at him, frowned, and moved a significant inch away from him. So he hated them.

He climbed the steps to the porch. He would open the front door in a few seconds. He would hear Anna call from the kitchen, "Arthur, is that you?" He would grumble, "Yes," and then she would start her eternal nagging.

But even as he reached for the doorknob he said, "Isn't once a day enough? Why must I torture myself even in my sleep?" It never occurred to him during waking life that he could do anything else than go home after work. And it never occurred to him while asleep either.

So he reached for the doorknob—and it wasn't there. The door wasn't there. The house wasn't there.

And in the world of reality he wasn't there in the bed beside his wife. She was alone, though the blankets were still humped up as if he were still there, and the pillow was still deeply indented as though the weight of his head still held it down.

THE SUCCUBUS had designed the female form well. It conformed in every way with the dream girl Arthur had created and searched for before giving up the search and marrying Anna.

As he stood there on the succulent meadow, unconscious of the grass underfoot, unconscious of the fact that he held out his hand to open a door that wasn't there, just as he had been doing in his dream, he showed in every detail of expression that the girl standing beside the stream had struck a chord in him.

The girl stood poised as though surprised and about to flee, but the expression on her face hinted that she was also attracted to him. So strongly that she had forgotten for the moment her state of disrobement. Her eyes were wide and round and dreamy. Her lips slowly parted in a smile. Her high, firm breasts rose and fell in quickened breath. Her arms rose slowly toward him in an unconscious gesture of welcome and invitation.

Then suddenly she glanced down at herself and seemed to remember she was naked. She raised her eyes

and looked deep into his, while slowly turning a beautiful shade of crimson. With her eyes still on his, she half turned and covered herself with her hands and her graceful arms. Not until then did she close her eyes with chaste lids and long lashes.

Arthur's heart was striking his ribs with sledge-hammer blows. This, he was quite sure, was also a dream. He wondered how he was able to dream this way again after ten years. It was in every detail the same dream he had created to while away the hours long ago before he had married Anna.

But not only had it inexplicably returned, it also was more vivid, more real, and his own sensations were more poignantly vivid and alive.

She half unveiled her eyes. Her smile tenderly rebuked him. Her voice of soft velvet thrilled into his ears. "Arthur!" she chided. "You shouldn't sneak upon me unaware. Go away now. You embarrass me."

"No!" he soothed, his voice purring with masterful confidence as of old in this dream. "I love you. I'm not sorry I—I surprised you in your bath." (But it wasn't the bathroom scene of old. Where had the stream come from? The meadow? The flowers and the trees?) He jerked his thoughts back to the lines of the dream. "Come. Into my arms. Let me hold you close. Feel your heart beat against mine."

WILLINGNESS flowed into her, visibly. She took a half step toward him, her arms dropping their concealment a little. Then shyness, wonderful thrilling shyness, possessed her once more.

She became crimson again. Her arms concealed. She turned sideways, one graceful leg arched concealingly. "I—I'm afraid," she whispered in a tone that plainly invited him to be

daring.

He laughed happily, amazed at the carefree confidence of his voice, at his sureness. He walked toward her purposefully.

"Arth—ur!" she squealed, in a not-meant protest, a lingering, delicious wisp of fear, and a surrender.

He touched her. Impulsively she flung from her the last residue of reluctance and held out her arms to him. He rushed into them, closing his eyes from sheer ecstasy.

In that instant, with perfect timing, the succubus transferred him back to his bed, still wide awake but unconscious of the shift of scenery.

"Darling!" he breathed masterfully—but his embracing arms collapsed painfully on thin air.

And the panting breath of the dream girl was suddenly the soft snores of Anna.

On one elbow, trying to adjust mentally to the reality, he looked down at her gross face with utter disgust and loathing. She stirred restlessly. Her mouth closed, interrupting her snores. She smacked her lips noisily and sighed.

Arthur dropped back on the pillow and closed his eyes. He tried to recapture the dream without succeeding. But even in failure there was the delicious sense of its reality. And from somewhere his dream girl's softly velvet voice promised, "Tomorrow, my sweet. And tomorrow."

And then the alarm was jangling and Anna was shoving him out with her obese shape. He was shutting off the alarm, his mind falling into its habitual groove.

"Get the coffee on and I'll be right in," Anna was saying as she always did.

Arthur's fingers touched the alarm button to push it in. At that instant memory flooded over him. He didn't

hear Anna. He didn't hear the alarm.

"Arthur!" Anna screamed. "Shut off that damned alarm!"

"Yes, dear," he said mechanically. He got up and went dazedly into the bathroom, oblivious of Anna floundering across the bed to the still jangling alarm clock.

After she had the thing quiet she stared after her husband, an uneasy light in her eyes. He hadn't gone to the kitchen first to start the coffee.

She opened her thin lips, her jowls quivering with indecision. But the words on her lips were never uttered. Worry and caution took possession of her. With grim quietness she slipped out of bed and went to the kitchen herself.

IT WAS a little after eleven o'clock when Anna paused outside the door to the department-store staff physician's office. She hesitated, still uncertain. Her thin lips quivered, then compressed with stubborn determination. She turned the knob and went in.

A few moments later she was sitting across the desk from the mild-mannered doctor. He was examining the card the receptionist had given him. "You are Mrs. Arthur Gilden?" he asked. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Nothing's wrong with me," she said. "It's my husband, Arthur."

"Hmm," the doctor said. "Isn't he at work today?"

"Yes. He's at work," Anna said. "It's just—well..." She fumbled with the catch to her bag, fumbled in its depths while the doctor watched, and brought out a printed booklet. "It says in here," she went on, "that..." Her fingers thumbed the pages until she found the page and pounced upon the passage. "Mental disturbances

often begin with little discrepancies in behavior. This is the time to investigate, before those disturbances become more pronounced. Often mental trouble, when caught in time, can be cleared up quickly and easily."

"Mr. Gilden?" the doctor asked significantly. When Anna nodded, he frowned thoughtfully, drumming his fingers against the desk. He started to speak, hesitated, then said, "Can you tell me about it?"

She was flustered. "It's really nothing you can pin down," she admitted. "I'm his wife, and I know him better than he knows himself, I guess..."

"I understand," the doctor said gently. "We should have something to go on, however insignificant. Please tell me."

Haltingly Anna told about the alarm clock, about having to put the coffee on herself. "All during breakfast," she went on, "he looked at me without seeing me. He had a silly little smile on, too. And when I talked to him he couldn't concentrate enough to understand what I said even after I repeated it three times." Tragedy crept into her voice. "If you knew him as I know him you'd realize how—how impossible..."

THE DOCTOR pressed the white button on his desk. The receptionist stuck her head in the door. "Will you please tell Mr. Gilden's department supervisor to come up here?" he said.

Anna fidgeted miserably during the ten-minute wait. Then the capable, masculine-looking woman entered. "You sent for me?" she asked.

The doctor said. "Miss Brighton, this is Mrs. Gilden, wife of Arthur Gilden."

Miss Brighton's features changed. She became all welcoming smiles,

while her eyes studied the wife of her problem employee and came to a few conclusions as to why he was a problem. They shook hands, and Anna felt relieved. One worry was out of the way. Arthur's boss, at least, was no competition to Anna's home life.

The doctor explained briefly. He concluded with, "There seems to be some cause for looking into this further. The mental health of our employees is always of great concern to us."

Miss Brighton's forehead creased into lines of concentration. "Come to think of it, Mr. Gilden has been too cheerful and courteous this morning. I hadn't paid much attention to it. I believe he's dressed a little more neatly, too. Now that it's been brought to my attention, I think definitely he's acting abnormal." She turned impulsively to Anna. "Not that I would say it's a sign of insanity," she hastened to add. "Maybe he met someone on the bus?"

Anna shook her head firmly. "He was his usual self last night. It was just this morning, when he woke up."

Miss Brighton turned to the doctor. "There was Mr. Farmer in ladies' shoes," she recalled to him.

"I remember," the doctor said grimly. "We shouldn't delay even a day. Send Mr. Gilden up here. I'll get Dr. Benton on the phone and see if he can come right over."

"Oh dear," Anna said, looking around for a place to hide.

"I'd suggest you go home, Mrs. Gilden," the doctor said. "Go right home. I'll call you afterwards and give you instructions."

He watched her flee and wondered at some men's taste in women. It was no surprise they cracked up....

"Poor woman," Miss Brighton murmured sympathetically. "I'll relieve Mr. Gilden at once and send

him straight up to you."

"**S**AY IT again," Dr. Benton said to the woman sitting across from him.

The incredibly thin woman screamed, "I hate you!"

The phone rang. "Again," Dr. Benton said calmly, lifting the receiver.

"I hate you I hate you I hate you!" she screamed.

Dr. Benton waved the receiver in an expression of calm. "Did the sky fall down and hit you?" he asked. "Of course not. Nobody's going to condemn you forever for expressing your feelings. Now—just a moment, please." He lifted the receiver to his lips. "Dr. Benton speaking," he said calmly. "Oh?... Just a moment." He glanced at his wristwatch. "I think I can make it.... Very well, I'll be over right away." He dropped the phone in its cradle. "An emergency," he explained. "Come back tomorrow at ten, Gloria. Tell your husband I want him to call me this evening."

Ten minutes later, as he passed through the reception room of the department-store doctor's office, he glanced quickly at the subdued clerk-type man who was its lone occupant aside from the receptionist.

"Hello, doctor," the receptionist said. "Go right in."

He did. The store doctor spent ten minutes briefing him on the case, then ducked out the private entrance for his lunch period. Dr. Benton took his place behind the desk and pressed the little white button three times.

Outside, the receptionist smiled at Arthur and said, "You may go in now."

A little trembly, and wondering what it was about, Arthur did as he was told. In the inner office he saw the man behind the desk and wasn't reassured. It wasn't the store doctor,

but the man who had passed hurriedly through the outer office a short time before. And he didn't look like a doctor. His beard, for one thing. It was long and untrimmed, partially concealing the deep cheek lines of the lean face, accentuating the cheekbones and jutting brows that framed the dark penetrating eyes. The beard went up into the scalp on either side of the face and became one with the unruly hair, making the man's ears two rough shapes sticking nakedly out through the mat of hair. The last thing Arthur noticed was the mouth, large and fluid in an intellectually expressive way. It caught his attention as the man spoke.

"I'm Dr. Benton," he said in a deep soothing voice. "Be seated, please."

Arthur sat down, not taking his eyes from Benton's lips.

"Your name is Arthur Gilden?" Dr. Benton said. "You work in corsets?"

Arthur nodded to both questions.

"Don't be alarmed," Dr. Benton said. "This is merely routine. It has been called to the attention of the store that you perhaps have something on your mind. Would you care to tell me about it?"

"I'm sure I don't know how they would get that idea," Arthur said, on the defensive. "If anything, I've been doing my work better this morning than I ever did before."

THE DOCTOR smiled. "Perhaps that's what they meant," he said. "Are you sure you have nothing you can tell me? Some unusual experience, perhaps?"

"No. No, of course not," Arthur said. He laughed hollowly and started to add something, then changed his mind.

"Very well," Dr. Benton said. "I'm going to give you a list of words.

After each I want you to give me the first word that pops into your mind. Man!"

"Slave!"

"Woman!"

"Sausage!"

"Food!"

"Fat!"

It went on for ten minutes. Suddenly Dr. Benton said, "This is very interesting." He drummed his long thin fingers on the desk top, scowling darkly at a spot over Arthur's left shoulder. Arthur swallowed thunderously several times and resisted the impulse to crane his head around and see what his tormentor was staring at.

"What is your home phone?"

"Why..." Arthur hedged, alarmed. He debated refusing to give it, then surrendered. "Hobart 5-9357."

The doctor lifted the receiver, then dialed out the number with the deliberateness of inescapable Doom. Arthur recognized Anna's raucous "Hello?" Dr. Benton purred into the phone, "Mrs. Arthur Gilden? This is Dr. Benton at the store. Your husband will not be home this evening. He is going to be staying at my rest home for the next ten days. The expense will be met by the store." He paused to let the flow of words stream from the receiver, then stemmed them firmly. "There will be nothing to worry about. Nothing serious. You will not be permitted to see him for at least the first three days...."

Arthur's panic and dismay evaporated under these words. A surge of pure joy flooded through him. Three days without seeing Anna! It was worth any price. When the doctor hung up and turned to him, he was almost pathetically eager and cooperative.

But he refused to say anything, then, or later in the evening when Dr. Benton talked to him.

THE SUCCUBUS alias the beautiful girl-plus-setting had not just sat out the day waiting for night to come. She had, instead, after returning Arthur to his bed, hopped ahead twenty hours in time, the emotion of the chase still fresh in her breast, and proceeded to bring him back. A slight wrinkle of a frown creased the milky smoothness of her brow beneath her crown of silken hair, at the unexpected switch in geographical location, but this was quickly brushed away. The events in the life of the victim during the day were of no importance.

Nor were they of any importance to Arthur. He had braved the day with impatience for it to be gone so that he could return to his dream. Any worry that disturbed him was concerned solely with whether he could recapture the dream he had had.

He had put up with Dr. Benton's prying as patiently as he could. He admitted to himself that there probably wouldn't be any harm in telling him the dream. He knew why he didn't. It was too precious a thing. To describe it to a stranger would be a sacrilege. Ever more so than describing a risqué affair with some real-life girl to one's friends. Hypothetical, of course, since he didn't consider the possibility of the latter even in his dreams.

When at last he was in the room assigned him, alone, with the neatly made bed a symbolic threshold waiting for him to enter, he became suddenly nervous and flustered, as though time were marching toward a rendezvous with genuine reality.

He undressed and put on the pajamas with *Benton Rest Home* stamped in large letters across the back. His fingers were clumsy and shaky. He laughed at them nervously, then at himself for laughing at them.

If it had been truly a date with a dream figment of his mind he could never have kept it. He would have lain wide awake all night. But already the succubus on the distant mountain top was reaching into his mind. When his head touched the pillow, soothing peace was already flowing into his body. A power greater than himself was relaxing muscles that had been tense and stiff. A dusky velvet voice was whispering intimately in his receptive mind. The nervous trembling quintupled its frequency again and again, and became a numbing, anesthetizing tingle.

In a few short minutes Arthur was asleep, and a short instant later he was no longer there. The pillow was deeply indented, as though the weight of his head still rested there. The covers were humped up in contours that would be impossible without a body under them, but his body was not there.

For a space of five seconds there was no sound. Then, from beyond one of the walls of the room, came a hollowly incredulous, "Good. God Almighty!" It was followed by the sounds of someone stumbling, the sound of a door slamming, of running feet in the hall, and of the same voice shouting, "Get Dr. Benton!"

"YOU MUST be mistaken," Dr. Benton said, but it was an automatic response. He was already half believing. The husky attendant was not one to imagine things.

He followed the man to the peephole and looked through into the room. At first glance it seemed everything was in order. There was a normal hump in the bedding. Arthur Gilden could be there with his head under the covers. Then he noticed the pillow. The indentation in it resembled half of a plaster mold.

He uttered a cautious "Hmm", and left the peephole. A moment later he was unlocking the door and entering the room.

Up close the pillow was even more remarkable. It was as though an invisible head rested there. He pushed gently against the hump in the blankets and felt it give slightly. He pressed harder. It gave a little more, but not much.

He frowned down at the bed for a moment while the attendant hovered at his shoulder. Then he took the edge of the blankets and attempted to turn them back. They caught in exactly the same manner they would have if someone were sleeping there with his arms on them.

Dr. Benton straightened slowly. He and the attendant stood side by side looking down at the bed and its invisible form.

"One minute he was there in plain sight," the attendant said wonderingly. "Then just like a change of scene in a movie he was gone, without so much as a quiver to the bed."

"That's what you saw," the doctor corrected. "Did you see or feel anything other than that? Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"You see," Dr. Benton said, "I think we've run into something here."

"Something darn unusual," the attendant admitted.

"But not impossible," the doctor said. "That's the axiom we must start from. What happened isn't impossible. The question then arises: what caused it?"

"He disappeared," the attendant said.

"Yes, yes, I know—or did he? He may be invisible."

"You mean still there?"

"That's one possibility. Name another."

"He isn't here."

"That's another possibility," Dr. Benton agreed. "What's another?"

"Is there another?"

"There's a possibility that he's here and not here."

"I don't understand."

"In fact," the doctor went on gravely, "that's the greater possibility of the three. It leaves him some means of coming back."

"I don't understand," the attendant repeated.

"I wonder what would happen," Dr. Benton said thoughtfully, "if I touched him...."

"You mean where he's invisible?" the attendant echoed. "You can have it. I wouldn't touch him for a thousand a week."

"I'm not sure I would either," the doctor admitted. "I might, but I want to think about it a while. Something might occur to me."

He placed his hands together behind his back and began pacing up and down the room thoughtfully, his beard pressed against his chest by his bowed head. The attendant stood silently, sometimes watching him, sometimes staring uneasily at the bed.

"There's a possibility I just thought of," the doctor said abruptly. "This might not happen again. This may be my only chance to find out what it is. I think I should touch him and see what happens. Take the risk."

He strode purposefully to the bed. His hand reached out and came to a hovering stop in hesitation. He glanced sharply at the attendant. "Whatever happens," he warned, "wait here and do nothing until morning. I may vanish too. Don't interfere or allow anyone else to. Understand?"

"Sure. Sure; I understand," the attendant said.

"Very well." The doctor turned his

eyes back to the bed and put out his hand to touch the invisible form.

Arthur Gilden lay there, asleep, a smile of contentment and weariness on his face.

“DREAM!” Dr. Benton snapped.

“Girl!” Arthur snapped back.

“House!”

“Hell!”

“Hell!”

“Job!”

“Date!”

“Tonight!” Arthur bit his lip.

“Home!” Dr. Benton went on without hesitation.

“Heaven!”

“Sick!”

“Tired!”

“Helen!”

“Lilith!”

“Horse!”

“Cow!”

And so it went for two hours before lunch, two hours after lunch. Then Dr. Benton retired to his office and studied his results. He checked them several times.

At five o'clock the attendant knocked at the door. “I was wondering if you had any instructions about Gilden for tonight,” he said.

Dr. Benton hesitated. “Look, John,” he started to speak abruptly. “I don’t make a practice of talking over my diagnoses. This thing’s different, though. I’ve got to talk to someone, and since you’re working so closely with me on Gilden’s case, perhaps it should be you.”

The attendant didn’t answer, but sat down quietly.

The doctor got up and paced while he talked. “This thing’s beyond credibility,” he began, “but then, so is what we saw. I’ve been giving Gilden word-association tests all day. I wanted to ask him direct questions. God,

how I wanted to! But I don’t dare, because *what is behind it* might find out through him. I got most of what I wanted to find out through the tests—and it’s incredible.

“Apparently, when he vanishes he goes into something, it doesn’t matter what it is. There he meets a being named Lilith, who appears to him to be a beautiful woman. Lilith, according to legend, was Adam’s first wife.”

“His *first* wife. I didn’t know they allowed divorces in those days.”

“Don’t be facetious.”

“Sorry,” John said. “I wasn’t, really. I just didn’t know. You caught me by surprise.”

“Adam’s first wife,” Dr. Benton repeated grimly. “Her name was Lilith. Now, I don’t believe any of that stuff. I don’t believe in Adam, in the first place. But it’s interesting just the same. The legends say that Adam and Lilith were created as a sort of Siamese twin, didn’t get along so well that way, so God separated them. They still didn’t get along too well, so God banished Lilith from the Garden of Eden and created Eve. Lilith became a demon. Not having committed the original sin, she remained immortal. She became the type of demon known as a succubus. And get this: a succubus, according to legend, is a demon who enters a man’s dreams, as a beautiful woman, to have an affair with him. Not for any good purpose, either. The victim usually winds up completely insane.” Dr. Benton pulled at a strand of his beard. “I don’t believe any of that, mind you, but it’s interesting in the light of . . . well, everything.”

The doctor nodded grimly. “On the surface,” he continued, “it would seem that a succubus has him in her toils. But that’s just appearance. I think it’s something more basic than a legend come real. *I propose to con-*

tact that being and bring it out into the open."

THAT NIGHT Dr. Benton made his first try. He touched the invisible shape that remained in the bed—with no results, if a frost-bitten finger could be called that. Touching the invisible shell was like touching liquid air. That in itself was apparently an inconsistency, since no such effect was produced on the air that was in contact with it.

The next day he left Arthur alone, and kept a few of his piled-up appointments. That night the attendant helped Arthur don his pajamas so that he wouldn't notice the message written on the back of them. The message read, "Lilith, I challenge you to meet me. Dr. Benton." And the doctor waited in vain. Arthur vanished on schedule and reappeared on schedule, the contented smile on his now perceptibly leaner features, the dark bands under his eyes quite noticeable.

"That's that, then," the attendant said consolingly. "There isn't any other way. If she won't notice you, she won't."

"There's another method I can employ," the doctor said.

The next night he injected morphine. He injected it at eight o'clock, a stiff dose, and Arthur was asleep in twenty minutes. The attendant then dressed him in another pair of pajamas that was covered with challenges in large black letters.

"I think I'll get some action tonight," Dr. Benton said. "I think you'd better watch from the peephole, John. And no matter what happens, don't make a sound. It could be fatal."

The time that Arthur Gilden usually vanished came and passed without event. Dr. Benton paced the floor, smoking nervously. Once he was

positive he felt an electric tension in the atmosphere. When nothing happened he shrugged it off as imagination.

Midnight came. One o'clock. Two. Finally dawn crept in through the window. The doctor gave up. In his own quarters he dropped on the bed and was asleep almost instantly.

At nine o'clock the day attendant awakened him. "The patient in 304 is violent," he explained. "His chart doesn't say anything about it."

The doctor sat up, wide awake. 304 was Arthur Gilden. "What form does his violence take?" he asked.

"He threw his breakfast at me. I put him in straightjacket and he asked me to kill him. He wants to die."

"I'll talk to him," Dr. Benton sighed.

But Arthur refused to talk any more. He refused to cooperate on word-association tests. He refused to eat. His eyes were two sunken coals in dark wells of flesh. He had aged ten years in appearance.

When the night attendant showed up and asked for instructions, Dr. Benton told him what had happened. "I'm almost afraid to try anything else," he added. "But I will try one thing more. A very mild sedative for him. Keep him in straightjacket tonight. I'm going to sleep. I've had a hard day, besides getting only four hours' sleep last night. If he vanishes, call me at once."

"Yes, Doctor," the attendant agreed.

That night he glanced through the peephole every fifteen minutes. It was almost midnight when he saw that Arthur Gilden had vanished. He hurried to Dr. Benton's quarters and knocked softly. When there was no answer he knocked more loudly. When there was still no response he tried the door. It was unlocked. He opened it.

Inside was darkness. He fumbled for and found the wall switch. The room flooded with light. In the doctor's bed the blankets were humped up as though covering the sleeping doctor. But Dr. Benton wasn't there.

"SO WE MEET at last," Dr. Benton said. He looked with frank appraisal at the nude girl by the stream, then forced his eyes from her to examine his surroundings.

A slight frown creased the smooth forehead. She dropped the concealing pose of her arms a trifle. "Yes," she said in a mixture of fright and embarrassment. But well concealed in the depths of her eyes was a cold light.

"Arthur tells me your name is Lilith," he said, turning his attention back to her and ignoring her revelation.

"I am Lilith," she said with quiet pride.

"Seeing you, I'm almost inclined to believe you."

"Oh, but I am!" she insisted, advancing a step toward him as though forgetting herself. Suddenly she seemed to become aware of her state of undress. A blush suffused her face and throat. She half turned. "Please," she pleaded. "You shouldn't come without letting me know, so I can be dressed."

The doctor's beard concealed the violent surge of his Adam's apple. He had to admit she had a strange effect on him. The vulnerable and shy maiden. With a supreme effort he regained his professional frame of mind.

"You don't need to be embarrassed," he played along. "I'm a doctor. I'm used to seeing undraped females. And, as a matter of fact, I've been trying to get to you for several days now." He uttered a short laugh. "You know, I had just about concluded you were afraid of me, in spite of

all your superior powers."

"Afraid of you?" she whispered. "Yes, I am. I'm afraid of what you might do to me."

"Nonsense," the doctor said. "What do you expect to gain out of that situation? I'll violate my regular procedure and answer that question for you. You hope to get me hooked emotionally. There's not a chance. Not if you were the most beautiful woman in all creation, when as a matter of fact you are probably the ugliest." His lips curled in a sneer.

"Take care," she whispered. "You are completely in my power, as you know. I could destroy you, body and soul."

"I don't think so," Dr. Benton said. "But even if you can, what could you hope to gain from that? A moment of spiteful revenge before you realized that it was a defeat for you?"

"I'm not afraid of you," she said.

Dr. Benton smiled slightly. "I wonder what made you say that? No, I know. You were really talking to yourself, addressing yourself. Why are you afraid of yourself? You should know all about yourself, shouldn't you? I would say that a succubus would be the last being to have something to conceal from herself."

"I have nothing to conceal from myself," she said.

"No?" he said. "You know, then, your true shape? I'm curious. Change back to it. Let me see you as you really are."

SHE STARED at him, frowning in thought. Abruptly she smiled. "I see it now," she said. Her laughter was a tinkling sound. "It's wonderful. You are afraid of your emotions! You can't trust yourself." Her lips quirked seductively. "I dare you to yield yourself to me," she said in a throaty whisper. "You won't, because you're

afraid. Afraid to be a *man*."

"Not afraid," he smiled. "I wouldn't be able to forget what you're like in your natural shape. And when it comes right down to it, do you get any pleasure in having men love you? Don't you always know, even during the ecstasy of the moment, that if they could see you with unclouded eyes they wouldn't come within ten feet of you?"

"What is a shape?" she murmured. "This one is real. Touch it. Hold me in your arms. Bruise me. Tear my flesh so that I bleed. You will find me real. Very real."

"I'm quite sure I would," Dr. Benton said, smiling broadly. "But I'm wondering why you evade the question?"

"What question?" she snapped.

"You know perfectly well. Or does it touch on a sore spot so that you *forgot* it? I dare you to recall my question."

"I don't remember your question," she said.

"I believe you. And it's quite significant. The question was, do you get any pleasure in having men love you? Don't you always know, even during the ecstasy of the moment, that if they could see you as you really are they wouldn't come within ten feet of you? And now don't you see the significance of your forgetting the question? It indicates that *it touches at your basic psychosis*."

"Psychosis?" She threw her head back and laughed. "Imagine!" she gasped. "A mortal psychoanalyzing *me!*"

"Your laughter is a little hollow," Dr. Benton said. "Tell me the truth. Were you really Adam's first wife? The one that was rejected?" He chuckled at the sheer rage that flowed into her eyes. "I see you intend to destroy me," he said, "but it's a little

late for that, don't you think?"

"Too late?" she purred. "I don't think so. Yes, I'm going to destroy you. Destroy your soul, and leave a mindless shell."

"Then you'll never know what I could have done for you," he said. "Go ahead. Get it over with." He turned his back to her and sat down.

The green grass was the indistinct contours of the drapes over the windows of his bedroom, with a thin line of light between them. He was awake, and had been asleep for several hours since he first sat on the grass. Half alarmed, he surveyed his mental powers and found them intact—then realized he could not have surveyed them unless they were.

What reason had she had for ending the interview? Time to think? Or was she going to avoid him permanently? That was possible, but he had played his hand carefully so that she would never be satisfied to just let things drop. He hoped. Or did he?

Suddenly he began to perspire and tremble. It was one thing to psychoanalyze a human. Professional habit had carried him through the abnormal interview. Now reaction was setting in.

Or was it reaction? After all, she wasn't so different in her reactions from any human being. Was she, perhaps, working on him in some way to break him down?

"Are you all right, Doctor?"

He lifted his head. The night attendant was sitting near the bed in the darkness.

"I think so, John," he said. "Though I'm not too sure. Mix me a good stiff drink, will you? I really believe I need it."

"**N**O, I'M VERY sorry, Mrs. Gil-
den," the doctor said into the phone. "Your husband is not doing so well. I'm afraid you can't see him to-

day. It was very fortunate that you did something about it when you did. Otherwise..." He left the rest unsaid.

It was twenty minutes before she would allow him to hang up. He thumbed through his appointments. He would have to take two of them. The others could wait. He made some phone calls straightening out his day. There was a knock while he was doing this. The day attendant came in.

When Dr. Benton finally looked at him questioningly he said, "Gilden wants to talk to you."

"Is he in straightjacket?"

"Yes, but I think he could be freed from it. Not without your okay, though."

"How does he seem? Rational?"

The attendant shrugged. "He's more like they get when they begin to accept the fact they're insane. You know. Anyway, he seems quite eager to talk to you about something."

Dr. Benton got up and followed the attendant. At the door to Gilden's room he motioned for him to wait there, then went in.

"Hello, Art," he said, smiling cheerfully. "I hear you want to see me."

"I do, Doctor," Arthur said. "I think I want to tell you everything now. Especially since what happened last night."

"Last night?" Dr. Benton asked, surprised.

"Yes. Last night I told her about you. The girl in my dream. She seemed quite interested in you. We..." He grinned embarrassedly. "We usually stay together for quite a while, but she made me stop dreaming about her so she could talk to you."

"And did she?" Dr. Benton asked, a tight smile on his lips.

"I don't know," Arthur said. His face cramped. "Night before last was

awful. Or was it night before last? Maybe it was before that. It was when you gave me the shot in the arm. I tried to go to her, and she tried to come to me. Maybe it was the dope, but we couldn't reach each other. Then she changed." He shuddered and his voice rose in pitch. "She was like Anna and all the others, only worse than any of them. More like a human female swine, even to pointed ears. Only it wasn't her. It couldn't be. But that awful thing laughed and taunted me and said she was Lilith. Only she couldn't be."

"Of course not," Dr. Benton soothed. "You understand it's only a dream you have, don't you?"

"I suppose so," Arthur said. "Only..." A stubborn expression came over his face. "No, I don't. Sometimes I'm sure it's real. That makes me insane, doesn't it? Insanity is when you think things in your mind are real, isn't it? So I'm insane." He looked down at the arms of his straightjacket.

DR. BENTON chuckled. "You have quite exaggerated ideas of insanity," he said. "People, quite normal people, have nervous breakdowns. They resemble insanity in many respects. They come from overwork, especially when that work is exhausting in a nervous sense. The first symptoms are usually that the patient begins to dream he's at work. Instead of relaxing, he goes through the day's work while asleep."

"Does he?" Arthur said, a light of hope dawning in his eyes. "I've been doing that for a long time."

The doctor nodded in satisfaction. It had been a fairly safe gamble. He could build on it now. "It's too bad," he said, "that you didn't know that symptom of impending breakdown. If you had come to me then, this dream

wouldn't have occurred."

"Then I'm glad I didn't," Arthur said fervently. "All my life I've wanted a pretty girl to look at me. None ever did. And Lilith seems so real. I love her." He said it simply.

"I'm sure you do. The fact that she isn't real doesn't take away from that."

"And I would be very happy staying insane the rest of my life if I could have her that way," Arthur said defiantly.

"That's one possibility," the doctor admitted. "However, the other night should warn you that it won't last. I would suggest you accept the fact of its being something temporary. Hold the memory of it, but turn away from it. And insanity isn't something you can acquire by an act of will. When your nervous breakdown is over, you won't be able to do anything to hold it. It will slip away from you."

"Okay," Arthur said, "but let me have just a few more nights with her, will you? Don't dope me. Just let me sleep normally and have my dream. If you let me do that I promise I'll do everything I can to cooperate with you."

"If I were to do that," Dr. Benton said, "you might as well not be under the care of a doctor. Let's suppose I gave you a few nights with Lilith. Would you feel any different about it then? Wouldn't you still want a few nights with her? Of course you would. The time to cooperate with me is now, while it's still only a nervous breakdown." He held up his hand as Arthur tried to break in. "Let me point out a possibility. Right now Lilith is the ideal. Your relations with her are a happy memory. Suppose in the next few nights she changes? Becomes like the women who are sausages to you, the women who make you a slave, who torment you?"

"But—"

"Let me say something," Dr. Benton persisted. "Suppose you cooperate with me. What can I do for you? First of all, I can snap you out of this nervous breakdown caused by overwork under very trying circumstances. But that's only the beginning. Why are you a clerk at a corset counter? Why are other men not as good-looking as you rich, presidents of banks, salesmen that earn real money, men who attract the beautiful woman and marry the most beautiful of them all? Their dream women in real life?" He watched that sink in. "You won't be turning your back on Lilith by cooperating with me," he added. "You'll be starting on the path to having a real flesh and blood Lilith of your own to come home to from a job that fits your potentialities."

Arthur was opening and closing his mouth in indecision.

"It'll be hard," Dr. Benton warned, "but in a few weeks you'll know I'm right. Tonight you get—morphine." He patted Arthur on the shoulder and left the room before he could recover.

"**M**AYBE THE morphine won't stop the thing from snatching him tonight," John said.

"That's possible," Dr. Benton agreed, "but I'm inclined to believe it's going to work. I have no idea of the powers or limitations of this creature. I can only surmise."

"What are you going to do? Go to sleep and let it take you?"

"No," the doctor said. "I'm going to stay awake until dawn. I don't believe it can function during daylight hours." He smiled. "Maybe it will come to me. I would prefer that. It gives me an advantage. Whether it does or not, I intend to stay up and observe Arthur Gilden's behavior during the night."

John shook his head wonderingly. "You've got a lot of guts, Doctor. I don't think I'd want that she-demon after me."

"Don't think I'm not frightened," Dr. Benton said.

In spite of his nervous tension he caught himself falling asleep before the night was very old. He wondered about it drowsily, until suddenly, wide awake, he realized that it might be the work of the succubus. He took benzedrine to fight it.

Until he took the benzedrine Arthur slept peacefully. Almost immediately afterwards he began tossing fitfully, trying to free himself from the straightjacket. Dr. Benton watched closely, trying to interpret what was going on in Arthur's thoughts from his actions and expression.

For half an hour Arthur fought in his sleep, then relaxed. Once more the drowsy feeling crept in, making the doctor want to sleep. He took more benzedrine. His pulse increased until he was acutely conscious of it. The drowsiness retreated.

Now an electric tension could be felt in the air of the room. At first Dr. Benton put it down as imagination, or an effect of the benzedrine—until he noticed the hair on his arms standing up. He touched his beard. Strands of it clung to his finger as he withdrew it. The electric tension was real, not imagined.

Was Lilith in the room unseen? He peered about, studying the air for signs of refraction or anything else that might be different. There was nothing, except for the growing electric tension.

Suddenly his eyes were drawn to a flicker of yellow flame that seemed to come out of the floor. His first impulse was to sound the alarm. Common sense held him. The floor was not burning. There was just the flame.

He stooped down and touched it. It was neither hot nor cold. It was, he decided, illusion. Other tongues of flame appeared. They became larger.

"Do you see anything unusual, John?" the doctor asked.

"I see those yellow flames," the attendant said from the peephole.

"All right, keep still now, whatever happens."

THE DOCTOR waited. The flames danced before his eyes. He looked into them, at times sure he saw a shape materializing, but always disappointed. He became aware that he was staring into the heart of the flames hypnotically. He had been almost asleep.

But suddenly a woman materialized in the midst of the flames. He stared at her, his heart pounding violently.

How long had it been since he had seen her? Thirty years at least. And she was more beautiful than she had ever been.

"Beth!" he said chokingly. He took a step toward her.

He halted, realization of the true nature of this visitation flooding over him like ice water. Beth had died in a plane crash. This was not Beth.

He blinked his eyes and forced the sweet memories back into their ballowed place. They were replaced by cold anger that this creature from Hell could defile something so precious.

"Hello, Lilith," he said calmly. "I thought you would come to me."

She widened her eyes in surprise. "Mark!" she said. "Don't you even remember me, your wife?" Abruptly she turned away, sobbing.

"What do you expect to gain out of this situation, Lilith?" he asked coldly. "Whatever you expected, your aberrated thinking has rebounded against you. Now I'm not afraid any more. I had thought you could hurt me. Now I see you can't. I pity you."

The woman in the flame turned to face him again, her lips trembling. "Don't you *believe?*" she pleaded. "Remember that night on the lake when we were first married, darling, how we promised each other that even death could never keep us apart? Come to me. Now. I swear by all that's Holy we will be together for all eternity. Only come to me now. Don't pause to think. You have this one chance. It can never come again."

In his mind an almost physical force was saying, *This I, Lilith, promise and will keep forever—if you come to me now.*

He hesitated.

Isn't it the form, the personality, the memories, that make a person? Can I not be in all respects your Beth?

He took a deep breath.

In all history you are the first man I have met that I would care to remain with. I despise all other sons of Adam. And that is truth.

"You would tempt me, Lilith," he said, "except for one thing. If that were straightened out I think I might accept. Your fixation."

"My fixation?" the woman in the flame said. She smiled dreamily. "I remember that. It was before we were married. Even then you were the eternal psychiatrist. You said love is the only healthy fixation. My love for you, your love for me. Do you remember?"

"Your fixation of hatred against all men because you were rejected by the first," Dr. Benton said patiently. "You have such superb mastery of your arts. You have powers never dreamed of by man. Think how you could use them for good, Lilith. You reach into my most secret memories and match hurt. What do you gain from that? Compare it with what you would gain if you did the same thing for good. You intended to hurt me. All you

have done is make me cleaner. That gives you a sense of defeat and frustration. Think how wonderful it could be if it gave you a feeling of having done something nice."

The form of Beth wavered in the flame, seeming to shrink, yet seeming to remain in some way unchanged and unchangeable. It became squat. Its wealth of hair became yellow flames that danced upward and became one with the other fires, leaving a flattish pate of crimson skin. The shell-like ears seemed to seize upon tendrils of fire and blend with them into pointed ears. Her face changed, and yet held the illusion of being as it had always been.

Lilith, in her true form, resting on haunches and knuckles, leered at him from under her cup-shaped upper lip. And yet it was Beth. It was Beth! Oh, God, it was Beth! He trembled with the horror of it. It was—

With almost insane frenzy he clutched at his wild thoughts, forcing them to slow down so he could influence them. It was *not* Beth. He fought off the illusion of identity. He won.

And he and Lilith looked at each other, resting, yet knowing that in another moment the battle would begin once more.

HE WAS unaware that on the other side of the wall John, the attendant, had fainted; that behind him Arthur Gilden's eyes were open.

He was aware only of the creature before him. There was unmistakable authenticity in every detail. The squat muscular body, the shape of the head, the way she rested on haunches and knuckles. Here, in physical form, was an ancestral type whose skeleton would be classed with the anthropoids. As such it lost its repugnance and assumed the aura of greatness associated with the wonders of the world.

Lilith—if Lilith it truly was—was not human. Dr. Benton recognized the subtle importance of that. She was not a squat ugly woman, because she was not a woman.

Yet, looking at her leering smile, the sheer intelligence that animated her face and watched him from keenly aware eyes, he realized that *she thought of herself as a woman*. And he could see why she would. She had watched the slow alteration of form as her race evolved into his. She had unconsciously identified herself with each stage of the evolutionary process. Absurdities seem reasonable only when approached by imperceptible and naturally taken steps. And Lilith had thought of herself as human for unknown millions of years!

With this new orientation toward her, Dr. Benton studied her again. There was a tremendous grace and aliveness about her. Almost a beauty as a mare is beautiful, or a dog or albatross or any other graceful creature. Her pointed ears, looked at in the light of being part of her rather than freakish, were in every way fitting and attractive.

Yet, over and above the physical there was something. The intelligence that animated her. Perhaps, the doctor reflected, it was the anachronism of seeing intelligence in nonhuman features that gave it added stature, made it seem superhuman in a very real sense.

Then he remembered how she had come into this room, her powers over space and shape. Had these powers been hers from the start? Had they perhaps been Adam's too? If so, the human race had indeed lost much!

He shook his head in slow wonder. "I never would have guessed," he said. "You are wonderful!"

It had been an impulsive, sheer tribute. Utterly sincere. He might have

said the same of a great painting, of a giant spaceship poised for flight, or of some great sculpture.

The leering lips remained the same for a long second. A muscle spasm seemed to twitch at them. They started the change; they visibly fought to hold their leer, and failed. They straightened into a line that was at once expressionless and ineffably lonely. The keenly alive eyes changed from anticipatory sadistic pleasure to shrewd analysis to amazement, and finally to numb hurt.

The psychoanalyst in the doctor recognized what his remark had done to her. Almost telepathically he could follow the trail of his devastating remark as it plunged through to the primal depths of her soul. His remark had been an impersonal tribute to an eighth wonder of the world—but being Woman she would never sense that. To her, the hopeless, fruitless quest, unconsciously begun when she was cast out of the Garden, to be replaced by Eve, had ended. The pattern of her behavior, the force of her eternal drive, had lost its keystone.

What would happen now? Not daring to move, to change so much as the set of his lips, the doctor waited.

The yellow flames that made the room a heatless inferno slowly died until they were a mere carpet of dancing, quiescent force, forgotten by their creator.

And still Lilith squatted there, the dumb hurt about her, her secret soul exposed nakedly so that Dr. Benton felt embarrassment for her and wanted to turn away, but could not.

Abruptly, so abruptly that he was aware it had happened but not aware of it happening, Lilith was not there.

The varnished floor glistened up at him. The pastel green walls looked back at him softly. The closed door ignored him prosaically.

Dazed, he turned slowly and looked down at Arthur Gilden. He was asleep, his arms not fighting the straightjacket, a peaceful smile on his partly opened lips.

"HELLO? WHO? Mrs. Gilden?

No, I'm extremely sorry, but you still can't come to visit him.... I know, but I can't allow it. You should resign yourself to it.... I'm sorry, but I'm very busy this morning.... Yes. Yes, I know you miss him—what? You're short of money? Oh, I see now. But it's impossible. I can't hold out any promises of when he can see you. Goodbye.... I know, but.... I know, but.... I'll have to be firm, Mrs. Gilden. I must hang up. Goodbye!" Dr. Benton slammed the receiver and muttered, "What a woman." He grinned wryly at the day attendant. "I should have a receptionist to answer the phone."

"Why don't you?" the attendant asked.

"I tried it once. Invariably my patients forced their way past her on the phone to me. I gave up. Mrs. Gilden would have done the same thing—kept at it until she talked to me personally. Have you looked in on Mr. Gilden this morning?"

"I just came from there. He's in a rational mood today."

"How rational?"

"More rational than you are right now."

"Good. I want to talk to him." The doctor stood up and stretched, his long arms extending almost to the ceiling, his untrimmed black beard splaying against his chest.

Fifteen minutes later, after briefly seeing three other patients, he entered Arthur Gilden's room. He looked around at the floor, the walls, remembering the events of the night.

"Hello, Doctor," Arthur said to him.

Dr. Gilden jerked his eyes away from the floor where Lilith had sat, and looked at Arthur. The man was still in straightjacket. Aside from that he seemed all right. Perhaps more than all right. His smile was quiet and assured. His eyes were clear. The black circles under them were barely perceptible.

"How are you feeling?" he asked abruptly.

"Okay," Arthur said. "I—" He bit his lip and became silent.

"Yes?"

"I was hesitating because I thought you might think me irrational or something," Arthur said. "I suppose all of your patients get that way."

Dr. Gilden looked at him sharply, then relaxed with a slow smile. "Sometimes," he admitted. "They don't always seem as sure of themselves as you do this morning, though."

"Maybe I am sure of myself this morning," Arthur admitted as though he hadn't thought about it that way. "I guess I am. You see, Dr. Benton, when you arrive at some conclusions that you feel are right, it doesn't much matter if you're crazy or not. The conclusions aren't. And that's what matters."

"Care to talk about them?"

"I'd like to. Very much. Remember what you were telling me yesterday?"

DR. BENTON tried to think. Yesterday, suddenly, seemed years ago. He smiled. "Suppose you tell me," he suggested.

"You were saying that the dream of Lilith can't last, and that my clinging to it another three days, or even another day, won't change that. The end will come and I'll be where I am now. You were right in one way, but wrong in another."

"Wrong in what way?" Dr. Benton asked curiously.

"I had another dream last night," Arthur said. "I don't want to tell you about it." He smiled ruefully. "You were in it, of course. I can even see some of the symbolic significance of it. There was a beautiful girl in it too, but it wasn't my Lilith. It was someone who was in love with you, and you were spurning her and insisting she was Lilith. See the connection? You were standing between her and me in the dream, keeping her from coming to me by making her someone else, and at the same time insistently telling her she really was Lilith. See the symbolic significance?"

"Um," Dr. Benton said vaguely. "Go on."

"Then, here is the important thing that happened. She changed shape slowly. When she got through changing shape she was the epitome of every customer that ever bought a corset at my counter. Squat, ugly, with a shape that no corset could improve. And do you know what you said to her? You put every ounce of sincerity into it, too! You said, 'I never would have guessed. You are wonderful!'"

"I did?" Dr. Benton said, swallowing loudly.

"And you should have seen her," Arthur said softly, his eyes bright with tears. "She looked like a woman who hasn't heard a kind word for a million years. Maybe two million. Why did I say that? Anyway, she did. And suddenly I realized the meaning of an old saying my mother used to quote. 'Beauty is as beauty does.' And for the first time I really understood what it meant. The dream ended then, but for the rest of the night I thought of my customers. They don't want to be fat and mean-tempered. They're—they're victims. Helpless victims. Somehow over the years they got shapeless. No one would ever again

tell them they were wonderful. They didn't want to face that. All they want is for someone to tell them they're wonderful—and mean it sincerely. And I saw what I had been doing. Mocking them in many ways, showing disgust at their gross bodies—the bodies they can't help.

"And I saw what I had been doing to Anna. Even in her teens she was fat. Maybe other teenagers poked fun at her. Maybe they just ignored her. And what happened? I came along. Not falling in love with her, but just giving up the search for my dream girl. Sure I told her she was wonderful—before I married her. Afterward? I associated her with my customers. I tried to ignore her, was angry and disgusted when she wanted to be playful. Playful like an elephant! That's what I used to think."

ARTHUR'S eyes took on a faraway look. "I can remember the first time I rebuffed her. She turned it aside with a hurt little smile and tried to make it seem unimportant. I could see her wanting to get mad, and seeing that it wouldn't do any good." His voice was almost a whisper. "How blind I was! How wonderful she was. Hurt, unable to do anything to change me, she still wouldn't do anything to hurt me. Not really. But I couldn't see it. I couldn't see that the spirit within her was as beautiful, perhaps far more beautiful, than in any girl with a swell shape. Do you know how we got acquainted? It was at a dance. I was too shy to ask the slender good-looking girls for a dance. I couldn't even dance very well. I'd just had five lessons. Anna came up to me and gave me a friendly grin, and said, 'I'm scared too. Would you dance with me?' And that was something else that girl in the dream last night said."

His face clouded with doubt. "Or

did she? Maybe I only thought it. 'Isn't it the form, the personality, the memories, that make a person?' And I realized even then it wasn't true. The form is just a shell. The personality? It's there for someone to see, to bring out, to appreciate and admire. The memories? They are what you have experienced, and how you've experienced it. They are kind words, little attentions from someone who loves you."

The tears were streaming down Arthur's cheeks unashamedly. "And I know now that, though I never loved Anna before, I do now. I love her! Do you understand? I don't care if I'm crazy. If the most beautiful girl—if Lilith herself—were to throw herself in my arms right now, I would turn my back on her with no regrets, because I love Anna. And..." Wonder and infinite peace crept into his voice. "I always will."

IT WAS THREE days later. Dr. Benton sat alone in his office. They had been three days of peace and rest. Uneasy rest, in some respects. He and John the night attendant had kept their vigil each night, waiting for the return of Lilith.

But she had not returned. Once he had been sure he felt her presence in the room. A fleeting impression that was gone before he could turn his head. And now he felt sure she would never return.

Arthur Gilden had not had a relapse. With the straightjacket off he had made the most of his vacation from the world, reading and playing checkers with another patient.

And now—

A knock sounded at the door. "Come in!" he called. Mrs. Gilden appeared in the doorway. The thin lips in her fleshy face smiled timidly. Her eyes, seeming small and piglike

in their fields of flesh, reflected fear and hope.

"Come in, Mrs. Gilden," Dr. Benton said. He could see the contours of the corset under her dress, the corset that almost gave her a waistline, that almost gave shape to her hips. "Come in," he repeated kindly.

"You called me," she said breathlessly. "You asked me to come here." Her hands with their short fleshy stubs of fingers were visibly trembling.

"Yes," Dr. Benton said as she sat down, the chair creaking dangerously under her. "Yes. You can see your husband."

"He's better!" It was a glad cry that was quickly replaced by fear and uncertainty, and the thought that maybe she could see him because he was so ill seeing him wouldn't make any difference. "He is...better?" she whispered in the conflict of her emotions.

"Much better." He smiled and leaned forward. "I want to warn you, though, that you're in for a surprise. I want you to be prepared. I'm not letting him go home quite yet. I must insist that he remain here another two or three days. I want you to agree to that. It's necessary, for his good and for yours."

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I would do anything for him." Her eyes were fixed on his in a torment of hope and worry. "The surprise?" she asked. "D-does he—that is, does he want to leave me?"

"He's on the other side of that door over there waiting for you," Dr. Benton said. "I'll let you see him alone. You can have only half an hour with him. No more. Do you understand?"

She nodded from the depths of her

misery, raised herself, went toward the door. When she reached it she turned and looked at him in mute appeal.

H E HAD wanted to say nothing. He had wanted her to learn it from Arthur himself. Now he weakened. He opened his mouth to tell her that the surprise she was in for was that Arthur loved her. But he couldn't take that from Arthur. Not that.

"Good God, woman!" he snapped irritably. "Go on in!"

She blinked, her flesh trembling. Then slowly she turned and went through the door.

It closed behind her.

Dr. Benton got up and strode angrily to the window. He stood there, his shoulders hunched, his hands locked behind his back. In the far distance beyond the city rose the snow-peaked shape of a mountain.

His fierce eyes fixed its lonely grandeur, clung to it, while his soul tried to quiet itself, to lay the memories of his own dear wife to rest. With him there had been only Beth. There could never be another. In spite of Lilith's sacrilege—or perhaps even because of it—those memories remained inviolate.

But what of Lilith? Was she, per-

haps, perched on some high pinnacle of—that very mountain he was staring at? Or had she gone on, to some far-away space and time, forever fleeing from herself?

Or had she at last found peace? It was a possibility, he mused. But he would never know.

A knock interrupted his reverie. His head jerked around. He stared angrily at the innocent door. "Come in!" he snapped. Then he inhaled deeply, quieting himself by a supreme effort.

The door opened slowly. A woman came in. She looked around curiously, clutching at her purse. She looked at him and smiled with nervous quickness.

"You are Dr. Benton?" she asked.

He was staring at her, a catch in his breath. She was somewhat like Beth would be if she were alive. Tall, clean-limbed. A frank, healthy, almost beautiful face that hinted at quick humor and good sportsmanship. It wasn't Beth. But why did he suddenly feel so short of breath?

"Yes," he said. "I am Dr. Benton."

"I'm Mary Smith," she said. "I was wondering...that is, I was...what I want to ask you is, could you use a receptionist?" She smiled, her chin dimpling. "I'm looking for a job."

THE END

THOSE CHUMMY SCIENTISTS

MOST SCIENTIFIC information is now guarded more carefully than if it were composed of gold and jewels. With the world divided into two armed camps, the general exchange of scientific information cannot be as loose as it was before World War II. Of course, within the Western world, all but atomic information flows pretty freely—and the necessity of preserving secrecy on that is clear when the recent espionage cases are considered.

But within the limits of the Western scientific world, there are some very encouraging signs that the free interchange of science, and the accompanying world-wide sense of camarade, still exist. Re-

cently, after the widely publicized convention on space travel, held this year in London, a new organization was formed, an organization called the "International Federation of Astronautics".

The most encouraging fact about the growth of this group is the realization that they're not groping in the dark, hoping for the eventual development of rocketry. Rocketry is here and now with us. Military applications have given it an immediacy which is apparent to everyone and which is encouraging in the extreme, for even military applications have their direct connection with space travel. Rocketry is on the way!

—Jon Barry



**When people grow careless, they are ripe
for a dictator. This holds true everywhere:
in a nation—in a world—or in a universe.**

CHAPTER XI

PLANET'S RIGHTS

IN MAY of the year 2324, the Martian Primary Council committed a gross act of omission, an act the consequences of which could not have been dreamed of at that time. (1)

(1) *Pivotal Points of History* (Bard Kinchon Sensitapes, 2440): Hul Syndrome, the peerless historian, states, "The Martian Omission of 2324 established a historical trend with as far-reaching importance as the birth of Christ, the election to the United States presidency of F. Delano Roosevelt, and the murder of Robert Dante.

"The birth of Christ established a religious authority which built a major world trend by eventually absorbing all other faiths except orthodox Judaism. The election of Roosevelt must more properly be considered a symbol of the great bloodless revolution accomplished at that time which, except for minor conservative reactions, set the liberal pattern under which the last great leader-nation functioned, and led the way toward world unity.

"The death of Dante was also a symbol—that of the last great reactionary period which delayed human progress for several centuries.

"The Martian Omission was the signal gun for the reversal of the great-cycle trend toward centralized government, begun in 1932 to last over five hundred years.

"It is worthy of note that the Martian Omission was the only great pivotal point of history that did not create an immortal. The names of the men involved in that historic decision are scarcely known. At other points we have—in the major cycles—Christ, Roosevelt, Dante, Orville Wright, Robert Fulton, Gandhi. In the minor cycles there are Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie, W. R. Hearst."

During that month, at the regular meeting of the Council at Third City, it was discovered that no two members wished to accept the "honor" of election as World Federation Council Members and take passage to Denver in order to attend the meeting. (2)

Such a situation had never before come into existence. And it was all the more strange because no formal protest as to treatment of Martian representatives had ever been made at the World Council. (3)

Obviously, the people were bored—and the World Council reacted in a

varying pattern. Its members would have preferred to ignore the incident, temporarily at least, until its importance could be measured. Public reaction did not allow this, however, and what the President and High Cabinet feared was forced upon them: a vote of censure as the first step in possible measures of punishment.

The vote was taken and it cut a clear planetary line that was the first proof of a cleavage long in existence. The vote was: for censure—28, against censure—9. The latter were cast by

(2) From the recorded minutes of that historic meeting, now in possession of the Ford Library and tape collections:

"Do I understand the honorable member does not wish the prestige of world federation councilship...you understand correctly my interests here are of a nature too important to justify my absence why does not somebody else go...do I understand that no member wishes this honor then there is nothing to do but inform the world federation council that mars does not wish representation...what is so bad about that the representation does not mean a thing the earth members do all the talking anyhow last time I was allowed four minutes to ask for polar development plans and the speech was not put in the records we finally made the plans ourselves...when I went they lorded it over me and let me know they did not think we were very important...I hope you gentlemen understand that this may bring serious repercussions I know of no precedent...I know of two off-hand although there are many more in 1776 the people of the eastern north american midcontinent did not wish to be represented in the english council...the honorable member has that wrong the american midcontinentals complained about not being allowed representation and refused to pay their tax...they got involved in a war...I think you are right there was another one late in the same place a split in the nation that developed there...they had a war too...gentlemen this is not getting us anywhere...I think you are wrong for the first time we are getting somewhere issue a clear statement we are not going to bother to come any more...but send the taxes as usual we do not want a war... that is preposterous draft a statement and let us get this meeting over with I want to go home."

The recording is a curiosity in that it was not calibrated to individual vocal vibrations, but left in the original monotone recording. No editing for formal tape presentation was made. This was not oversight, one gathers. Rather, it was proof of the Primary Council's realization of the unprecedented move of defiance they had made. None of them wished, individually, to be identified with their own voices.

(3) An unknown reporter on *Behind the Masks*, a flourishing scandal-tape of the time, presented another angle of the affair. These tapes are also in the possession of the Ford Library: "If you want the real truth, here it is. Council Member Mayhart's wife was the power behind the balky local council in the 'no representation'. She had a very unhappy trip to Earth the last time hubby carried the Martian honors. She and hubby got put at the foot of the table at the President's Dinner, even below the Venusian representatives, and she got pretty mad. She told hubby they weren't going again. When she got back she talked to other wives and they told their husbands they were staying on Mars. And there was something about another hubby spending an evening with an industrial public relationist who was after a less restricting export code from outer Martian ports. The trouble was that the public relationist was a girl who didn't wear clothes during the later part of the evening, but we won't go into that."

The comment of Leed Synman, a popular Martian wave commentator of the period, may be the most enlightening of all. *Leed Synman Speaks* (from the files of the Galaxy News Service, Fourth City Mars): "...At least something of interest happened...in a Solar family where nothing of interest has happened for years...except maybe in Venusia."

Venusian and Lunar representatives.

It was the end of the World Federation.

The action set Earth squarely against the so-called outposts. This would obviously be the first big test of the Universal Police Force. In order to function on so large a scale, however, the force needed broad augmentation. Even the more so when it was realized that, while the outpost members—those recruited from Mars—did not resign or desert from

service in any great number, they would not enjoy policing their own planets. The nine outpost Council members resigned and left for home immediately. Earth's role was made clear. It would have to move against two planets and a satellite. But in public opinion it would be bringing colonies back into line. Truly, an Abraham Lincoln was needed. (4)

One man could have made the decision that might have healed the schism. Rogersmith Kent, (5) who was

(4) Zood Zcamsman, *A Crisis Without a Superman* (Galaxy Photo-Press, 2328).

(5) The vast bulk of data on Rogersmith Kent is inaccurate and not worthy of use in an unbiased history. Most of it is pure falsehood, created to fill the public maw of hatred. One very rare tape, however, is filed out of index in an Earth university. It is a conversation between Kent and Loyal Marker, A member of the High Cabinet under Kent. Beyond all doubt it is authentic.

Marker: I believe the Cabinet would act favorably upon a vigorous directive from you, Rogersmith.

Kent: I'm grateful for their respect and trust, but the decision—

Marker: Surely you see the consequences of a weak stand!

Kent: During these last days I have made a study of the clearest precedent I can find. The American Civil War.

Marker: Then you will act vigorously, of course! No better example of resolute movement exists than that of Abraham Lincoln when the South proposed to split the union.

Kent: I'm afraid, Loyal, you take the popular view.

Marker: The obvious view!

Kent: But is it the correct one? There are factors many overlook.

Marker: Lincoln held the Union together.

Kent: And to what avail? What resulted? A nation still divided in spirit. While it functioned under one head, the postwar procedures were the same as between the victor and the vanquished. Opportunists moved into the South. There were cruelties, injustices. The South languished, beaten and poverty-stricken, in that bitterness for decades. One hundred years later, if the historical records are correct, the South still hated its vanquisher. It would have revolted again, except the power and strength were lacking.

Marker: But those things are not to be avoided after so bitter a struggle. I've read its history, and there is one thing you forget. Had Lincoln remained alive, his power and greatness would have healed the breach.

Kent: Perhaps. But Lincoln was killed. Let us consider the possibilities if the South had won its fight, if the mid-continent had become two nations. I think the bitterness would have been healed quickly. The two nations, working for mutual benefit, would have been a far stronger world unit than one nation torn by old hatreds.

Marker: But that is contrary to all principle.

Kent: I don't think so. Observe the manner in which the United States and Canada worked for mutual benefits and formed the strongest nucleus in world history. Their borderline was never abolished in fact, but to all practical purposes it vanished in 1961 during the abortive Russian invasion. Is it beyond conception that three friendly nations with a common objective could not form a stronger nucleus?

Marker: I can't agree, Rogersmith. I—

Kent: And another point, one you brought up yourself. You said that if Lincoln had lived, he would have healed the break. Lincoln was a great man, one that comes rarely. This situation far transcends that which Lincoln faced. And tell me, where do we have a man of even his stature to cope with it?

Marker: You are President of the World-Federation.

Kent: A title, nothing more. A small position entirely in keeping with the small thinking and doing of this current age. We have no great men, Loyal. The time is not of the quality to breed them. I do not think a great man will ever again rise among us.

President of the World Federation, was looked to for direction. As a result of his inaction, his name has gone down through the centuries steeped in infamy. His role of arch-villain has achieved stature through the passage of time. And unfairly so, because the depths of the stain has increased and the results of his inaction unfolded on the world-stage.

Beyond all doubt, Kent was as fine a man and as good a statesman as the era was capable of producing. The decision he made sprang, no doubt, from careful decision on his part.

Rogersmith Kent's statement at the end of the tape was the prophetic inaccuracy of all time. The greatest man of them all was due to rise. And the negative action Kent contemplated at the very moment the tape was recorded would give that man his opportunity of greatness.

A man not of the Lincoln fiber, but greatness cannot be judged in the light of good or evil. Truly, Lucifer, though he fell before the onslaught of the heavenly hordes, was the greatest angel of them all. (6)

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRTH OF A COLOSSUS

Samuels, in his *Life of Byron*, said: "The painter of Byron's portrait, in order to obtain perspective, would have to stand with one foot on Earth, the other on Mars, and sweep colors across a universal canvas."

(6) The writer cannot claim basic authorship of the rhetoric involved in this bit of observation. The structure is borrowed from the ancient poet and dramatist, William Shakespeare, whose powerful works are transcended only by Omati Ozagi of the 21st century. In Shakespeare's great classic—*Julius Caesar*—he had Caesar's apologist, an able rabble-rouser, say in anguish: "This was the noblest Roman of them all!"

(7) In *Up From Depths*, Purdy refuted the entire myth of Byron's origination, a myth put together carefully after Byron attained power. The fallacy of the manufactured past may be discerned in the fact that the exhaustive Samuels picks Byron up most gingerly during his twenty-fourth year. Any previous references to his life by Samuels is (deliberately?) vague.

After this rather flowery beginning, Samuels went on to write three excellent volumes on the superman's ninety eventful years, volumes which will be used as frequent reference in these pages.

Samuel's opening paragraph is mentioned here, however, in order to claim justification for jumping across one hundred and fifty years of world history, in order to bring him upon the scene. Nothing will be lost, however, as any pertinent data of those years will be filled in. The jump is made because it is high time that Byron began throwing his gigantic shadow over these pages.

Nor can he be flung at the reader abruptly. His background must be at least superficially examined, in order to perhaps find justification for his creation. Byron had his basic beginnings in a violence that occurred in Venusia in the year 2485. For a glance at this incident we read from Purdy, a writer whose fascination for Byron led him into vile and murky by-paths in search of information. There is every reason to believe that Purdy's words are entirely accurate. He paid for them with his life, because Byron did not agree with Purdy on the facts of his own origination. (7)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Chapter XII will be continued in the next installment of the history. It will tell of the death of the child's foster father; the situation under which the child was hurled into the vilest slums in the universe, how he lived during the first years.

Purdy's forthright statement after exhaustive investigation: "Lia Norian was a girl of good family and great personal beauty. Her parents, Hela and Zeen Norian, Lunarians from birth, resided in the community of Orphean, Third Section, Luna.

"At the time of which we speak, supervised student voyages were common and popular. In the year 2484, during Maymonth, the Norians permitted their daughter, then 29, and a student in Sociological Studies, to visit Venusia with one of these tours.

"The tour was efficiently and adequately supervised, of that we can have no doubt. But during a group inspection of one of the lower, more vicious tiers of that famed hell-spot, young Lia was observed by a savage degenerate named Saul Higger. What afterwards transpired can be pieced together from the girl's story, and the confession of Higger while in the throes of death.

"Higger, upon seeing the girl, was seized with a lawless desire to possess her. This in itself is not strange when Higger is considered in his true value, little more than an animal in whom physical degeneracy was supreme motivation.

"According to the girl's story, a service boy wearing the uniform of the hostel in which the tour-group stayed, appeared at her door early one evening just when her three roommates were visiting in other parts of the hostel. The service boy was Higger, of course, and the situation of Lia Norian's being alone was not coincidence.

"He informed her that her father wished to speak with her on visitel, that all circuits were occupied except an emergency circuit in the lower level of the building. The girl accompanied him without thought of treachery. Only when she reached the lower level did suspicion arise. But too late. Higger overpowered her and took her through a condemned tube to a small abandoned waiting room of the old transit system. There, he either ravished her viciously, or he did not. We will never know. The girl's testimony is valueless from this point on.

"The girl escaped from the abandoned station after an unknown period of time had elapsed and returned to her hostel. She gave a hysterical account of the abduction and the authorities went immediately to the scene of her confinement. They found Higger lying on the floor, slashed, ripped and gashed in most horrible fashion. That he was still alive and able to speak is amazing in itself.

"He readily admitted abducting the girl, but stated the action had been observed by another man—if Higger's testimony is to be taken as true, an even more vicious Venusian degenerate than Higger himself. Higger said the man had followed him into the station and attacked him in a frenzy.

"Then the man ravished the girl at his leisure while Higger, writhing in last agonies, looked on. Nothing that the girl said refutes this.

"The hostel authorities and those conducting the tour, in fear of crippling lawsuits, deliberately manufactured some evidence here. The girl, while dangerously hysterical, was not physically marked in any manner, a miracle in itself when one considers the caliber of beast that held temporary sway over her. And it was, of course, within her instinct to deny, even to herself, the truth of what had been perpetrated upon her. So, by leading questions, by assurances and deliberately false directives, the authorities planted variations of the true story into her mind. She had been carried off. Her abductor had been attacked before he could defile her. While her attacker and his assailant were fighting, the girl escaped and ran back to the hostel.

"On the basis of that story, settlement was made and the authorities considered themselves fortunate. It was a cruel deception, however, because a state of pregnancy resulted, and by the time the girl gathered courage to tell her parents it was too late to correct the condition."

At this point, the action of the parents causes one's mind to fill up with confusion. They disowned their daughter and ordered her from their house.

This well-nigh unbelievable action has been amply verified. Purdy, it would appear, failed in his handling of this facet in that he conveniently berates the father and mother for sheer heartlessness. This may be justified, but it hardly explains. It would certainly seem that, upon discovery of the girl's condition, the truth of what occurred in the abandoned station would be realized and that the parent's natural action would have been one of defense rather than castigation. There is no indication, other than the heartless repudiation, that they were not excellent people.

The truth probably lies behind a mistake in history. While their cruel action against their daughter is fairly well-authenticated, one is almost forced to disbelieve it and believe that the girl, panic-stricken by the shame of the situation, left her home of her own accord. But here another incongruity arises. Again we have ample proof that her parents made no effort to locate her and bring her home.

The affair is indeed shrouded in mystery.

After leaving her home, Lia Norian took up with a decent-enough young man of no attachments named Free Sorenson. Sorenson must have fallen in love with the girl because, knowing her condition, he took her with him to—of all places—Venusia, where he obtained a unit in the shabby but respectable section of the infamous city and registered Lia as his wife. Sorenson augmented the sustenance allowance by working as a minor technician with the air-conditioning authority.

And in Venusia, slum of the solar family, was born a child of violence who was to become Byron the Poet, giant of the latter age.

I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE

By Dean Evars

He'd been there before, so he thought he knew his way around. But things had been added — strange things that turned him into a complete stranger.

THE LEERING pumpkin in the sky was getting too big for its breeches now. Instant by instant, breath by breath, it was swelling up; a big sprawling ball that slopped all over the universe. I turned away from it and watched instead a woman colonist at the next port. The big yellow planet she stared out at was sucking at her, making of her

eager eyes two worshipping pilgrims at the altar of the greener pasture.

Mars.

I closed my eyes and leaned back. To hell with it. To hell with this planet trouble-shooting. If only I'd been born back in the days when Mars didn't mean a continental one way or another. Ah, those palmy days when a brain—they were known





He lashed a cruel hand across the girl's face.

as "private eyes" then—could stack his feet up on a wooden desk and watch sin go by, and tilt a flagon of Scotch whiskey to his mouth and wonder casually where the next month's rent was coming from. The golden age of man.

I sighed and opened my eyes and stared out the port again. Our ship was dropping toward her cradle below, with about as much fuss as the woman colonist spraying make-up on her nose. Sand. Everywhere you looked, sand. I got up, went to my compartment and crawled into my plastiskin.

Somebody rattled the door. The stewardess. Doubling in Medics. "Come," I said.

It was. She had a hypo in her hand and the professional *Interplanet Spaceways* smile on her face. A thin doll, like they all are since weight counts on a space ship.

She came over. She started to say, "Why, will you look out there, Mr. Nicholson! Through the port there...!" Phony excitement in her voice.

"You can skip the little act," I said dryly. "I've been out here before. I know what's coming anyway."

Her smile soured. She flipped open the small window in the plastiskin at about where my wrist stops being my wrist and gets to be my hand. She brought up the hypo. She slammed the needle into my flesh. Getting even with me for spoiling her fun. The top of my head lifted like a jet whizzing off the launching ramp, and my teeth came down hard.

"Necessary," she said tartly. "Acclimatizing shots. You're going out into a new world and you're not physically suited for it."

"I've been here before. I know."

"In fifteen minutes you may remove the plastiskin; by then the shot will be taking effect."

"I know. I've been here before. I just said that, remember little sister?"

She reeled in on the needle. She didn't answer me. I said again: "Before. I've been here before."

And that bought me nothing too. She turned abruptly, went out toward the woman colonist's compartment. I sighed a little. It was *her* first trip. I wondered at the same time if anybody had ever sighed over me.

They had a man waiting for me, the Governor's aide. He was a small, thin man with a humorless mouth and eyes that saw nothing but official business. I raised a hand at him as I went down the ramp from the ship.

"Mr. Nicholson?" His voice was an echo of filing cabinets opening and closing. I nodded.

"The Governor sent me, Sir. I'm Frederic Claws. Had your shot, Sir?"

I showed him my swelling wrist.

"Ah. We can be going then. The Governor is probably waiting, Sir." He turned abruptly, led me out of the small crowd of passengers to the moving belt laid out on the sands like a strip of metallic carpeting. Behind me in the cradle the space ship hunkered down low, looking very old and very, very space-beaten.

"Stay on the belt, Sir. Sands are sometimes treacherous."

"I've been here before. I know." I followed in his footsteps. My wrist hurt. My eyes hurt from the glare of the sands. The moving belt jerked when I got on it like a man when he's just taken a hard one in the navel. I didn't see the woman colonist anywhere. Mars. I shook my head over it.

WE WENT into the Administration Building, and down a long deserted corridor. Claws stopped before a door with gilt lettering on it. He said: "This is it, Sir. You may go on in."

"I know. I've been here before. I keep telling people."

"Ah."

"Ah," I said. He went away then, and I touched the button and the sliding door went back.

It was the quiet office to end all quiet offices. A redhead—new since I'd been here before—with sleepy eyes and everything else that went with it, sat at a monel-topped series of desks transferring dictaphone rolls onto a reel of tape that was feeding a hungry recorder. The recorder was chuckling softly over it. A clock up on a wall was making a tiny "blip" sound but that could be excused—it wasn't very loud. Aside from that the only sound in the room was the redhead's breathing.

Staring at me from the depths of a fancy velvet chair that had armrests which probably weren't really solid gold, was a dried-up man who must have been in his fifties the day I was born. He was staring moodily at me as I crossed the room. I said: "Good evening, Governor."

"Mr. Nicholson." His voice was a tired whisper. "We've been expecting a brain, but I didn't know it would be you." He gave me old, gray eyes that looked like blocks of impervium set in parchment. Cold eyes. Grave-like. He said, motioning with a thin wrist: "Helen, my dear."

The redhead looked up. Her sleepy eyes took me in. She got up, came over to me with a small box in her outstretched hand.

"No, thanks," I said. "Never touch it before supper."

"Joker," she said. "I hate jokers, little man. Repeat after me into the mike: I, Charles L. Nicholson, in consideration of the sum of twenty thousand dollars, do solemnly swear I shall apply myself diligently to project *Homestead*. Failing in this, may God help me in my exile."

I gawked. "Twenty thous...exile...?"

"I'm waiting, Mr. Nicholson." It was the old man in the chair. You don't disobey the old man. I swallowed. I shrugged. I repeated the words.

The redhead nodded shortly. "Thank you, Mr. Smith," she said. She took the little box away.

"Smith?" I shook my head and looked around at the Governor again.

"Have you never heard of anyone named John Smith?" he asked.

I still gawked.

"Exactly. But how many men do you *know* named John Smith?"

I BLINKED. I looked from him to the sleepy redhead. She was studying me like you study the canal system on a dull dry day. I said: "So I'm supposed to be John Smith. So something about this job makes it that important."

"Quite. This project is extremely secret. No one knows of it but we three. It involves homesteading—and the transfer of homestead property."

I didn't say anything to that.

"You know, of course, that although on this planet all development work such as mining comes under the Federation Bureau of Mines, nevertheless should a homesteader discover uranium or some other radioactive substance on his own thousand-square-mile plot, then that discovery is inviolably his. By ancient traditional homestead understanding, this has become law."

I listened. The redhead went back to watching her recorder. The clock up on the wall went on making the "Blip" sound.

"Also under present Federation laws," he went on, "these colonizing homesteaders are allowed to sell off their property any time they wish."

"One thousand square miles," I

grunted. "Nice snug hunk of sand."

"Precisely. But that is neither here nor there. Recently there have been one hundred and two such sales. Does that seem significant?"

"The Federation doesn't like it," I said.

"The Federation doesn't like coincidence, Mr. Smith. Or what seems like coincidence. We could ask Security Intelligence to look into it officially, of course, but we'd rather not do that. We're not sure of anything, and such resulting publicity is not what we're seeking. And also, if the suspicions are well-founded, we want the core, not just what falls into the nets."

"Core?" I said. "Nets? Suspicions?"

He raised his thin hand. "If..." his gray eyes became mere slits and his voice went very quiet "...if these homestead sales are not coincidence, picture what could happen, Mr. Smith. Overnight, a powerful bloc of natural resources in the hands of Corporate-minded few. Federation doesn't like to think about that. Would you mind at this point making a very good guess why?"

I THOUGHT about it. I'm supposed to be a private brain. I said slowly: "You mean if a group got hold of enough of this stuff, there might be danger of revolution. A war. And maybe if it came to that, Federation might collapse. And then Earth would go back to being just nations again like back in the old days."

"Correct, Mr. Smith. Revolution, yes. And should it ever occur, all progress would be set back centuries."

I took a long breath. "And you want me to confirm. And if you're right, you want the head of it."

"Exactly."

"No."

"Twenty thousand dollars, Mr. Smith."

I took another long breath. "Then again," I said, "there's that."

"I thought so. Now, what will you need?"

He knew what I was going to say, he even nodded as I said it. I said: "I want a grant of one of those homestead properties. And not just sand, either. I want good land, land you're sure is loaded."

"Granted. Helen will attend to that. Helen?" He took his eyes from me, looked over at the redhead. She nodded, came over, began to peel the plastiskin from around me.

"You won't be needing this," she said. She smiled. That was sleepy too.

The old man over in the chair began to look bored. "Good-bye, Mr. Smith," he said softly. "You must come visit with us again sometime."

Dismissal. At the sliding panel I turned, looked back. The old gray eyes weren't bored now. They had a hard, calculating look in them, and the old parchment of their frames gleamed dully in the soft, quiet light.

I LAY ON my bed in the *Interplanet Arms*. By Earth standards it was a walk-up but you can't be fussy; it was the only hotel they had. I thought about the Governor. They don't space a brain all the way out from home base and then pay him twenty thousand dollars just for the sake of scooping a little surplus off the treasury. He was worried about it. He was so worried he didn't want to call in the logical people and dump it in their laps.

That made the door rattle. I sighed as it rattled again. I touched a button on the bedtable and the door slid back.

It was the thin stewardess with the long face and the longer needle. She

came in, closed the panel behind her, said coldly: "Will you please get up off that bed? I have your second shot for you."

I stared. "You again? Don't they have anybody else on the whole planet who knows how to pump that thing? Get out."

Her mouth went grim. She crossed the room. She looked down at me. She leaned over. "This happens to be my duty, Mr. Nicholson. Or is it Smith now?"

She wasn't liking me. Her eyes said that if it weren't for strict duty she wouldn't be here, that in her circles they didn't mix with escaped convicts who changed their names.

I gave her a sour face. I said: "Yes, it's Smith now. And tomorrow it'll be Minnie the Moon Maid. I'm a TV star, lady. I'm traveling incognito. Like to see my rave notices?"

Her lips got grimmer. She grabbed my left arm. "The ship will be in cradle for two weeks. During that time you will get your shots from me. Please remain available."

I leered. "Is this a proposition?"

Her lips got grimmer yet. She got a running start. She whammed the needle home and grinned nastily when I began to eat holes out of the pillow with my teeth.

"Next shot in ten hours. Please leave notice at the desk downstairs if you plan to be away." She jerked the needle out, turned, started for the door. Just like that. No cool hand stroking the brow, no tender words. The panel snicked shut behind her.

My arm ached. My head ached. I reached down into my bag and got out a bottle of essence and took a snort. On my empty stomach it made the room warp. I stuck the cork back in, put the bottle back, put on my shoes and left the room.

YOU CAN'T call it a town. It's a brawling brat of a community that spills all over the sands; something that some day is going to take years to clean up to make it really liveable. But to the colonists it was home.

In addition to the *Interplanet Arms*, the long central street boasted two bistros where people can eat and take tired secretaries. Besides these, they have a scattering of domed buildings which serve for executive staffs, science lab and the like. And farther down, away from the center of everything, a few other places with dubious labels such as the *Red Sun*.

It was pay day, and the place was doing quite a bit of business. The bar held about a dozen miners, each one of them doing his little bit to keep the long bar from degravitating off into the night. Around the walls, intimate little booths with shoulder-high sliding doors were handy for those who wanted to sit down or something.

There were lights—a very very few—and music with romance in it like generators nobody has ever oiled. Last, but in no wise least, there was smoke and there was smell.

I took an empty booth, and that brought a bartender over. "Mixed essence," I said. "Go a little light on the seltzer."

He didn't like that. He leaned over, placed one red, solid fist on the table top, and brought his heavy, pocked face down into mine. He said in a voice that had gravel in it: "Look, doc, you ain't got no dame."

"The way it goes sometimes," I said.

"It ain't done, doc."

"Like this for weeks," I said.

"I mean you gotta have a dame. We got rules around here, doc. No gents allowed in the booths without a dame."

"Mixed essence," I said.

"LOOK!" He let a few rocks get mixed in with the gravel in his throat. "You gotta have a dame!"

"Dame?" I said.

"Yeah. D-A-M. Dame." His bushy brows were coming together in a straight unbroken line across the tops of his eyes. His fist was still on the table top but it looked anxious to shake hands with my left eye.

"He's got a dame. Rustle those drinks!" A sleepy voice cut in suddenly.

I JERKED. The barman jerked. I turned my head just in time to see the last of a pair of sleepy-looking legs sliding into the booth on the opposite side of the table. A sleepy-looking face topped by sleepy red hair smiled a sleepy little smile.

The barman stared. "Pickups," he growled. "Run a respectable place, they keep telling me."

"Sure," I said. "Two mixed essences."

He mixed them. He put the glasses down. Breathing heavily, he went away again. I leaned to one side and closed the sliding panel of the booth.

"Nice timing," I said to the girl. "Considering you didn't know I'd be here in the first place; didn't know when I'd be here in the second place; and didn't even know you'd be needed in the third place in the first place."

Her sleepy eyes still were on mine. "You're nice, little man."

I put my palms down flat on the table. "All right. You take it, I'll listen."

"You're nice. Like I said."

"Drink your drink," I said. "The Governor know you're in a place like this?"

She picked up her glass. Sipped it. Put it down again. "Like I said," she said. "You're nice."

That bought a little silence. I took my drink, poured some of it down. I still hadn't eaten, but the mixture left me cold, as all bar mixtures will do. Mars or Earth, they're all the same.

I stared at her. She had her fingers laced now on the table top. Her red hair was flame seen through fog, and her eyes had that kind of sleep in them that makes you wide awake.

"All right," I said. "But in one second flat it'll explode. Understand? You can faint then, or hit the sands, or drop dead."

She didn't answer.

"Just so you know," I said. "Just so you realize." I emptied my glass. I cupped it in my palm and took aim with it and slammed it hard over the panel door into the bartender's pocked face. Then I banged my open palm down on the flimsy tabletop and yelled out a curse they'd hear right across spaceways through imperium hulls and all.

The redhead's eyes snapped open. Then she screamed and went under the table.

Having no previous experience with the local ways of hometown boys, there is always one dandy way to learn in a hurry and that is to start something. The smoke in the place, and the noise, and the smell suddenly hung suspended in the air on the girl's scream, but not for long. It broke loose again. The panel door crashed back and the bartender, whose local feelings seemed to be outraged, poked in a local hair-grown fist and the fist was aimed at my eye. I ducked. I grabbed at it. I clamped my teeth down through the hair until I felt the flesh underneath. I bit the wrist in half.

He bellowed. He roared. His body catapulted across the table toward me. I went up, over, out.

After that there was a little action. A little cursing here and there coming from all around me. A little determined effort. A little of somebody getting his brains stomped down flat. I felt my chin cracking down hard on somebody's foot, and as I passed out I wondered if I'd hit somebody's bunion and made it throb. A pity.

THE PLACE stank. It had a big, sand-fouled globe in the center of the ceiling that threw illumination naked and hard in a small circular spray on the bare floor, leaving the corners of the room dim, webbed, mysterious places people never looked at, never swept, just spit into.

The booking desk was old, scarred. Behind the desk, nostrils flared and eyes set in the cynical mold of policemen, was the head of Security Intelligence, Captain Renetti X. Croner.

He studied me, his thick lips curling. Then he moved his eyes slantwise and looked at the bartender on my right. He said in a voice that really didn't give a damn: "He doesn't look drunk. What happened?"

The bartender was waiting for this. He said eagerly: "Like this, Your Honor. This space-happy mug comes barging in the *Red Sun* all alone. He makes for a booth. That ain't allowed, like I tell him real polite. So he gets nasty, but right then some tramp promoting drinks sidles up and gets in the booth with him. What could I do? I wait on them. I'm trying to run a respectable..."

Croner's eyelids fluttered. His thick lips moved slightly like an asp stirring fitfully in its sleep. His wide nostrils spread-rhythmically with his breathing.

The bartender jerked a little smile out. "Yeah. Well, a second later I hear a crash from the booth and a scream. I don't exactly see what hap-

pens because at that second somebody heaves a highball glass in my teeth. I stagger over to the booth and I look in. The first thing I know this drunk here bites a hunk out of my arm. And after that he sort of passes out."

I SNORTED. That made Croner take his eyes off the bartender and slant them at me. "I passed out," I said. "And in falling I got all these lumps and this black eye and this cut on my mouth. Just from quietly sliding to the floor dead drunk."

"The guy's a damn liar, Your Honor. I never laid a finger—"

"For God's sake!" I yelled. "You know what you can do with that stuff! It's a fine thing when a newcomer can't go in a place and order a simple little mixed essence without being—"

"You a newcomer?" It was Croner. He was suddenly staring at me.

"Yes. All I did was go in that filthy dive and—"

"What's your name? Where you staying?"

"John Smith. Right now I'm at the *Interplanet Arms*."

He thought about that. He looked from me down to his big blunt fingernails. Then he looked up. "Where's this woman? The one went into the booth with him?"

The bartender shrugged. "I dunno, Your Honor. She fades when the drunk goes nuts. I never seen her before."

Croner's eyes went down to his fingernails once more. Then: "One hundred dollars cover the damage?"

That was the one the barman had been waiting for. He grinned hugely, said: "I—I think mebbe it might, Your Honor."

"All right." He looked up at me. "One hundred dollars. Or one hundred suns. Take your choice."

I stared hard at his eyes, at his

flared nostrils, at his thick immobile lips. I did then what anybody would do. I put two fifties on the scarred desk.

"Dismissed," Croner said. His eyes followed me out. So did those of the barman. And that's the way of Security Intelligence with a newcomer.

I left the booking office, and took the moving metal strip back to the *Interplanet Arms*. I went upstairs to my room. In anybody's language I'd had enough for one night.

But it seemed I wasn't to get any rest. She was waiting for me and she was sitting in the only chair in the room and her eyes didn't look any different from the way they had before—they were still sleepy. She smiled, said: "By Jupiter, little man, you really show a girl a time, don't you?"

"What in hell you doing here?" I demanded.

She got up. "They were pretty rough on you, weren't they?"

"Yes, they were pretty rough on me," I said nastily.

SHE STOOD before me, studying me from different angles. "They didn't do too much damage at that. You're still nice, little man."

"You know," I said, "you're going to have to pardon me for bringing it up, but that line gets a little worn in spots."

She smiled sleepily. "You're predictable, little man. I figured you'd do something like this tonight. Let the whole town know you'd arrived. I figured it like that. So I just had to go down there and watch you put it on. I think I like you, little man, you're nice."

I let it go by. I went over to my bag on the floor and got out the bottle and took a drag of straight essence. Holding the bottle to my lips I looked at her. She was red hair and

eyes and curves—all sleepy. I opened my lips again and took a snort strong enough to gouge out a new canal right around the globe.

"Get the hell out of here."

She smiled.

"Out!"

"You're nice, little man. First time I laid eyes on you in the Governor's office I said to myself, this little man is nice. Real real nice."

I put the bottle down. I went from her flaming red hair down past her sleepy eyes, her sleepy mouth and down her full sleepy figure. I took a deep breath.

"Come here."

"My name's Helen, little man."

"Come here."

She moved in. I kissed her. I kissed her again, hard. Her sleepy arms came up and around me and her sleepy body pressed into mine hot and urgent. Suddenly she wasn't sleepy at all any more. I pushed her away. I brought up my right-hand palm open and slapped her with it twice across her mouth.

"Now talk!" I snarled.

But she didn't. Her eyes blinked twice, quick batting movements to keep the tears back. She took a small trembling breath. Then she went to the door, slid it open. As she went through she paused, turned around and faced me, and a soft sound like a lost night wind on the endless deserts floated across the room from her lips.

"That doesn't change a goddam thing, little man," she whispered.

And then she was gone, and I put the bottle to my mouth again and held it there until it was empty, and I held on tight to the back of the chair she had sat in.

IT SEEMED people liked to knock on my door, I was popular. I stood there and listened for a long time to

the knocking before I went over, put the bottle down in my bag and touched the button on the bed-table.

It was the thin man, the Governor's aide, Frederick Claws. He came in, smiled a little, said apologetically: "It's very late, I know, Sir, but the Governor said—"

"Okay. Come in."

"Thank you, Sir. The Governor said you'd be wanting this sealed envelope right away, so I thought—"

"Okay," I said. "Put it there on the bed-table. Glad you came. I want to ask you something."

"Very well, Sir." He was used to orders. He liked orders; time of night meant nothing to him. He put the papers down, looked over at me.

"Who's this redhead works in the Governor's office. This Helen."

"Helen, Sir? Why she's the Governor's secretary."

"She's new?"

"That's so, Sir."

"She got a pretty good reputation? I mean, you ever been out with her? Ever get essennated with her?"

"Essennated, Sir?" His eyes popped.

"Drunk," I said. "Just plain, old-fashioned, crawl-up-the-back-stairs drunk is what I meant."

"Me, Sir?"

I sighed. "All right. Push your eyes back in. You don't know anything about her, then?"

"N-no, Sir."

I studied him. He wasn't the part. He'd never be the part. He lived and worked in a little world all his own and he didn't know any other existed.

He smiled up at me. He said pleasantly: "You—you're going prospecting, Sir? I've always wanted to try my hand at that, but—"

that meant himself, the sleepy redhead and me. But the thin man facing me had asked me if I was going prospecting. I shrugged, let him see my tired eyes.

"I need a rest," I said. "The Medics tell me I've got to cut down. Live the simple life."

"Ah." He smiled again. "The simple life. Yes, Sir. Nothing like the simple life, Sir. My wife's mother used to tell me that, Sir. Used to tell me I'd die young, since I worked such very late hours. But that's quite amusing, considering here I am, still carrying on, still—"

"In spite of it," I said.

"You might say that, Sir Yes, Sir. Was there anything else, Sir?"

"No, I guess not."

"Then I'll be getting home, Sir. My wife worries, you know, and I'm quite late tonight."

"Belt along then," I said. "'Night."

"Good night, Sir. Have a good sleep, Sir."

I watched him go. Good night, Sir. Have a good sleep, Sir. Are you going prospecting, Sir. I gave him two minutes and then went after him. The big doors were just snicking shut behind him as I walked across the small lobby downstairs. I followed him out.

Off to the left were the dome huts where office workers, colonists and miners stay. But the thin man turned to the right. He went down toward the edge of town where the now-darkened places like the *Red Sun* huddled.

It was the black night of the age, but he didn't seem to mind. He stepped on to the moving belt and let it carry him down. He moved, shuffling his feet a little as a person will do. I could feel the movements transmitted as little jerks on the belt under my feet.

He passed the *Red Sun*. Quiet in-

I BLINKED. The Governor had said only three people knew of this and

side now. After closing hours. The only sounds were the little protesting things that came from the belt underfoot and sands under that.

We had the street to ourselves, we had the planet to ourselves. We even had the galaxy to ourselves, with the sole exception of a huge spaceliner in the sky above the Administration Building. The liner was letting down on quiet repulsers beaded for the landing cradles which would mean the end of the long long trek across space. The *Red Sun* smelled as I went by.

There were only four more buildings now until he got to the desert edge. Beyond that there was nothing but the sands. Now three more buildings. Now two.

Now one.

He suddenly leaped from the moving belt, darted swiftly into the darkness of the building. It was a shabby place like the *Red Sun*, but at night you couldn't tell more than that about it. I went around after him. I looked down the side of the place. There wouldn't be any tracing him now, his footsteps were already obliterated by the shifting sands. I stopped dead and listened.

"Now!" somebody hissed.

He had struck me as a gentle man, the thin man. He had never been out on a binge. He had never had anything to do with the redhead because at home there was the little wife who worried. And besides that, he wasn't the type at all. He loved his desk and his filing cabinets and his work. He seemed to me a very gentle man, the thin man.

And he swung his right with a jolt that drove my teeth right out through the back of my head.

THEY DON'T catch many murderers on Mars. You just walk up

behind your man on a dark night, stick a heat gun in the small of his back and let him have it. Then you put your arm around him and let the moving belt carry the two of you out to the edge of the desert. Then you just let him fall down, and it's as simple as that; the evidence is gone under the constantly moving sands. Of course, there comes a time when the sands uncover what has happened, but by then it's too late, Security Intelligence can't convict on dry bones alone.

And that's what brought me to. Sand was piling over me, blanketing me. I raised a fuss about that. The deal doesn't work unless a guy is stony dead, and I wasn't quite. And sand was getting up my nose.

Light was in the sky now, gray and cold, and the dawn wind was strong. I cupped my hand around my nose against it and got to my knees. I got up slowly, weakly. I took a long look at the building around which the thin man had vanished. It wasn't a saloon like the *Red Sun*, but it didn't look like the thin man's home, either. What else it was or wasn't didn't seem too important at that moment. I staggered over to the moving belt and sat down on it and rode back into town to the *Interplanet Arms*.

The clerk at the desk raised his eyebrows and a few early miners on their way to the shafts grinned a little. And that was all. Here on Mars, a pulverized human disturbs the population like a raise in pay. I went upstairs, started to touch the button combinations that would unlock the door panel of my room.

THE PANEL was already unlocked.

I stood there blinking stupidly down at it. I didn't have a heat gun on me—and if there was someone inside he'd be waiting, ready. On the

other hand, right at the moment I couldn't think of anything else anybody could possibly do to me that hadn't already been done. I slid the panel back and went in and my spine came shaking along behind me.

It was the stewardess.

I let out a breath. "This is nice," I said. "I pay for the room and every dame on Mars uses it."

She didn't like that. Her thin frame stiffened and the hypo in her hand jerked. She started to say something nasty—and then didn't. Instead, she stared with eyes you could have poured a cup of tea into.

"You've been hurt!"

"That's pretty good," I said. "Nobody had to prompt you or anything."

She shook her head impatiently. "Get in bed! You need attention!"

She was so right. I crossed to the bed, started to fall back on it.

"Not with your clothes on!"

I gave her a look for that.

She didn't like that either. Her lips went together tight. She put the hypo down on the table next to the envelope. She leaned over me, grabbed angrily at one foot, tore my shoe off. Then the other foot.

"Lie down!"

I let my head hit the pillow.

"Open your mouth!"

She shoved a pill at me.

"What did they do to you?"

"They worked me over. I thought it showed."

"Why?"

"They didn't like me."

"Why?"

"I asked too many questions."

Her thin lips tightened again. And then, strangely, the lips began to climb up the side of her face, went slithering over the top of her head and over her hair, and down the other side and wound up curled around her nose

and seemed to like it there and came to a stop.

"That's dandy," I said. "That's a good trick. Now put it back again."

She was cooperative. The lips suddenly uncurled and darted down between her inadequate breasts and disappeared, and stare as I might they never came back up again. And then it didn't seem to matter any more. Nothing seemed to matter any more, not even the thin sounds of the woman's words as they floated above my head.

"The poor guy really took a beating," she said.

I passed out as cold as the wrong side of Earth's moon.

THE DAY was hot and the sands were just a little bit more than they'd been yesterday and the day before and the day before that. I stared up at the place. Over a wind-worn metal door was a tiny sign that said *The Berenice Rooms*.

It was the last place right on the edge of the desert, and there wasn't any opening around the side of it where Frederic Claws could have tucked himself. It sighed. I shoved the metal door open and went inside.

Inside was a circular space, the walls of which made you feel like being under an inverted cup. There were six panel doors set into the rounding wall and not a window in sight.

I rattled the first door on the right. I waited. Nothing happened. I rattled it again. Nothing happened once more. I went on to the next door and rattled that.

It took a little moment or two but finally the panel slid back an inch and then two more inches. I stared into the weary-looking eyes of the woman colonist who'd been on the spaceliner with me. Her hair was stringy now and the makeup she'd

sprayed on her lips had worn off hours ago. She didn't know me from a Venusian nightmare.

"Go 'way," she muttered thickly. "God, can'cha let a person sleep?"

"The greener pasture," I said.

"Huh? What'cha smart? Get the hell outa here."

She tried to work up a little hate in her eyes but it was thin. I said, "You know a man named Frederic Claws?"

"Huh?"

"Claws. Small. Thin. Talks like he owed you money and afraid you might sue."

She said "huh" once more and then her eyes moved away from mine, went over my shoulder toward the front door of the place. She grunted bitterly: "Privacy. You pay your rent and privacy is what you get." Her lips jerked down in a sour frown. "Like the privacy of hell. That's the privacy you get 'round this dump."

I GAWKED. "Lady, what would you expect?" I said. "Look. I asked about a guy named Claws. Just give me the answer and I'll get out and you can go back to the way you like it again."

"Privacy!" She snorted it. Her eyes were still over my shoulder toward the front door where I'd come in. "Ask them, why don'tcha?" She slammed the panel in my face.

I could have rattled her door panel once more just for the hell of it, just to see the bright anger flare in her eyes, but I didn't. Instead, I sighed to myself and turned around and stared smack into the four eyes of two uniformed men who were standing just inside the scarred metal front door six feet away. I suddenly understood what the woman colonist had meant by privacy.

They were waiting for me. They came over. Security Intelligence uniforms. They took my arms. One of them said: "We thought we'd wait, Smith. Polite guys, that's us."

"Nice," I said. "You know me and everything. Let go my arms."

"Little ride, Smith." The taller of the two said that. He was smiling pleasantly. His partner echoed it. "Yeah. Nice little ride."

We went through the door. They had an official 'copter outside standing twenty feet away. I gave it all the consideration it deserved. Before I could go half that distance—granting I could break away from them—their heat guns would melt me down like wax on a hot day.

"Let's have it," I said.

"That's the boy, Smith," the tall one said. "We figured you'd be reasonable. You're a reasonable guy, anybody could see that. You take a man and you walk him into a dark place like that back there, and you put a heat gun on him and punch the button and down he goes. Reasonable. That's why we figured like we did about you."

"Sure," I said. "I stuck a heat gun on a guy and down he went and that was reasonable. Only I forgot to find out who he was."

The shorter of the two clucked. "Careless of us," he said. "We ain't mentioned, I guess. Why, a little thin guy, it was. Guy named Frederic Claws. Efficient little guy, worked for the Governor, he did. Before you knocked him off, that is."

I began to die a little.

The tall one nodded. "Right. Efficient guy, Claws. But, hell, I know how it is. The guy wasn't very popular anyway. So you melted him down. Reasonable." We got in the 'copter. It rose, hovered an instant, then swooped.

WHEN IT landed a few minutes later I didn't need to ask where they were taking me. I'd been there before. The big sand-fouled globe was still in the center of the ceiling and the corners of the room were still dim, webbed, mysterious places.

At the moment there was no one behind the scarred booking desk. They led me around it, and through a door that opened into a hallway. It wasn't a long hallway. It had two doors in it and a large open window at the end.

The tall one nodded at the window, said pleasantly, "I like open windows. Lets air in."

"Hell, yes," said the short one.

They stopped before one of the doors, took me inside. It was a square room like the booking office but small. Light came from a window in the outside wall. This window was closed. There was one chair in the corner and nothing else.

"Make yourself comfy, Smith. There might be a little wait. Don't go away." They left me. They closed the door. I heard their footsteps go down the hall, go out into the booking office again. I heard another door close somewhere.

Don't go away. I stared at the door panel. I thought about that. They hadn't locked me in, they'd just closed it. I stared some more and thought some more. They hadn't even searched me. They'd just left my door unlocked, and they'd told me not to go away. Like that.

I slid the panel back. I took two cautious steps out into the hall. And then I stopped, still thinking. I turned around, went back inside the room. Still thinking.

I slammed the door hard enough to knock a liner off its cradle.

Bingo. Even through the closed door I could hear the heat gun hiss

out suddenly like a darting snake's tongue, and after that the cracking and buckling of the monel window frame down the hall as it melted under the blast.

And that's the generosity of Security Intelligence for you. I dove at the closed window in my room and went out head first and found their 'copter and took it up like no 'copter is built to be taken up.

They didn't melt me down, I was that lucky. They hadn't expected I'd do it like that. They hadn't expected I'd be alive to do anything ever again.

I TOOK the ship up to the eighth level. That was another thing they wouldn't expect. Mars had only four levels of flight, one for each of the directions. I got the homestead grant out of my pocket and tore the envelope from it and spread it out on my knees and examined it. My grant was to the south in a valley near the extreme tip of the old canal. I set controls on the ship.

They were looking for me. The small vision screen built into the center of the instrument panel glowed brightly, and the face of Renetti X. Croner appeared in it giving terse orders to patrols. I listened to the orders; watched the various appearances of Croner's angry face on the screen. Croner didn't like me. It seemed I'd murdered a man the night before, and he didn't like that. And I'd done it lying flat on my back with the swirling sands playing over my unconscious body.

Two hours later I found the canal below. I let down. Directly under me now was one of those incredible anti-gravity booster pumps that had at one time sent water up out of the bowels of the planet and into the planet and into the canal and on its

life-giving way. It lay now, a neglected thing, its casting cracked open like an overripe melon, exposing the delicately machined precision vacuum valves inside. Obituary. The valves had been ruined by the shifting sands long long milleniums ago.

I went over it. A little distance away was the domed roof of a hut somebody had thrown up sometime in the past. I wondered about it until I remembered this grant of mine wasn't just another grant. That hut below would be one the Bureau of Mines had set up while they were nosing into the guts of Mars beneath. I surfaced and got out, and walked around carefully on the sands to the door of the hut. And trouble was already there, already waiting.

It seemed a little too much. The swinging metal door of the hut was open wide. Standing in the doorway was a thick, heavy-jowled man who watched me with beads of black eyes. His right hand was extended toward me, but there was one thing wrong with the picture: there was a heat gun in the hand and it was aimed at my stomach.

"Welcome, Smith." His voice sounded as though it had been raised in a brine barrel. "They said you wouldn't be able to do it." His thick lips turned to a sneer. "Them Intelligence guys. Them clever, clever Intelligence guys. Give 'em something in black and white and Croner wants to commit suicide. Give 'em something really tough and they think the world is all blondes and essence."

He moved his chin with a jerk. Then he stepped back out of the doorway, back inside the hut. "Come on in, the hospitality's fine."

YOU DON'T argue with a heat gun.

I went through the doorway carefully. He was the only one. There

were desks in the room and a chair or two and a vision screen, and that was all. I looked back at the heat gun. I figured he'd like it if I played along a little. I said: "They didn't know about this grant of mine. That's why I headed here."

That made him grin. It was a sadistic thing he'd developed over the years just for this one occasion. "You wouldn't connect a sweet guy like me with *them*?"

I shook my head—fast. "Uh-hbh."

"That's nice, Smith. You got sense. Yeah." He came toward me. The heat gun was a living, breathing thing in his fist and it had one deep hollow eye that sought me avidly. He laid the muzzle of the thing on my forehead gently. Then his eyes leered into mine.

I swallowed. He said, still grinning: "Them crazy Intelligence guys. Stupid. Too bad you and me ain't working together, Smith. Pals, we could of been."

I said "Yeah". I swallowed hard and let him see it, let him enjoy it. He nodded over that, it pleased him. He lifted the muzzle off my forehead, and took it up about four inches above me. He still grinned. Then he brought it back down in a swiping motion that had the idea behind it of cutting my face in two down the middle.

I could feel the blood gush out when my head snapped back. But I didn't put up a hand to it. I didn't do anything beyond the backward jerking which would be only normal reflex. I kept my hands stiff at my sides.

"That one was for free, Smith," he said, his eyes gawking at me. "I got something might interest you so I thought I'd just sort of wake you up before I let you hear it."

He backed me toward a chair and

the calves of my legs hit it. I didn't sit down, I stayed on my feet. My mouth had a taste in it that was salty as blood always is.

"You're in a picklè, Smith. You knocked off the Governor's aide."

I let it go by.

"And that's where the deal comes in. How'd you like Security Intelligence to suddenly get amnesia over what happened last night?"

I LET THAT one go by, too. He had more. He was just doling it out, letting me taste it bit by bit. His grin was still there and his small eyes were bright, cold, like impervium hulls seen in strong sunlight.

"All you have to do is sign over your homestead grant. Simple."

"You talk a lot," I said thickly. "But I don't hear a hell of a lot coming out."

He nodded. "There's more. You get a guarantee that the boys look the other way when the next liner pulls out for Earth. In addition to all this cake you get the frosting too, a nice little plum all set up back on Earth and all you got to do is lie back and sun your fanny for the rest of your days."

"That's nice," I said. "You think a lot of me."

"Sure. We all do. All the boys."

I took a slow breath. I said finally: "I don't like it. It leaves me cold."

That one shook him mildly. He merely shrugged and brought up the gun again. "Some guys learn the tough way. Some guys is hard to satisfy." His thumb went toward the button on the gun, found it, touched it lightly.

I swallowed hard again. I didn't have to fake anything doing it; when you're scared it isn't difficult to look the part. His eyes watched mine carefully, watched the decision they read there. He began to nod.

I said, "I like the first deal just fine. The one about the little plum back on Earth."

He nodded.

"Sign me over the guarantee," I said. "And I'll sign over the grant to whoever you want."

He stopped nodding. He grinned. "Uh-uhh, Pal. You first. I'm funny that way. Suspicious mind."

"All right," I said.

He winked. "That's what I call sensible, Pal." He put the gun away under his shoulder. He got out a pen, held it out.

I let him watch me take out the homestead grant from my pocket with my left hand. I did it slowly, carefully, like he'd want me to do. I took two steps toward him. I brought up my right hand to take the pen. He held it out, watching my eyes.

AND THAT'S where I lost the script. I suddenly balled my fist and wiped the grin off his face with a smash across the bridge of his nose he'd remember till his grandchildren had grandchildren.

It reeled him back. It curved his spine over the desks and he flailed out with his arms, trying to steady himself. Blood spurted from his broken nose.

"For the old folks at home," I said. "And now, one for just me alone." I went after him. Once he got his balance again, that right hand of his would dart in, flick out the gun and that would be all this side of eternity.

I pinned his right wrist, twisted it around with a jerk he'd feel to his toes. That brought his face around in agony. He tried to sign me off with his left and his knee came up in the same motion.

I stopped it. My fist sank into his navel up to my elbow. His head came down again. I kneed it. He

went flailing back and this time he couldn't stop himself. He went backward, slamming across the desks and his outstretched arms became a cross of submission stuck in the sands of unconsciousness.

I went over to him on shaking legs and got his gun, and after that I sat down and sucked in breath as deeply as I ever would in this or any other world, and I waited for him to come to.

It didn't take him long. He came out of it cursing through thick, badly puffed lips. His body began to slide sideways off the desks.

"For a big guy," I panted, "you go down easy. We'll now march out to the 'copter and we'll get in and we'll curl up on the floor."

He was awake now. His small eyes were etching my ancestors with the acid of his hate. He got unsteadily to his feet. "The door," I said. "It's that way."

He moved. His legs didn't appear too steady under him but I didn't cry over it. He went through the open doorway. I followed. He went stumbling badly out on the sands toward the 'copter. I stopped in the doorway, reached around to slam the heavy metal door shut.

HE SEEMED to have some sixth sense about that. The half second my eyes were off him was all he was waiting for. When I brought them back on him once more he wasn't stumbling, he was plowing through the sands fast and headed for the ship.

"Forget it," I said.

He didn't. He jerked a sneering look over his shoulder at me. He was almost to the ship now. He was going to make it. He was ready to bet his final breath on it he'd make it.

"Last call, guy!" I yelled.

He sneered over his shoulder again. I wasn't going to shoot. I was yellow and now he had the 'copter and in one more second he'd be up there in the pale cloudless sky and I'd be left behind, and a hell of a lot of good one short-range heat gun would do me then.

He got his right around the handhold and jerked himself upward. There wasn't anything else I could do. I put the gun sight on him.

He seemed to go up in smoke, but that was only illusion. His clothes were burning off his back. And then his thick, heavy body slumped backward into the sands and there was the smell of roasting pork in the air that made me want to vomit.

"Sorry, guy," I whispered. "You would have it that way."

I HAD IT now. Closing my eyes and letting pictures drift across my mind I knew I had had it for a century and a half. The pattern was the old familiar one and just because this was Mars didn't make it any different. I took the 'copter back. I got it down, got out, went through the lobby of the *Interplanet Arms*.

I could have bet a buck on it and it would have been a fast easy buck to make. She was there in the same chair and her red hair was the same and there wasn't anything different about her sleepy eyes and her sleepy smile. She said: "I've been waiting for you, little man."

"That I wouldn't doubt a bit," I said. I crossed the room to my bag and got out a fresh bottle of essence and uncorked it and put it to my lips.

"You drink too much, little man."

I put the bottle down. I stared at her. "You know," I said distinctly, "if you'd try real hard, I'll bet you'd find another tape lying around somewhere."

That particular one isn't going to last forever."

She sighed. She looked sleepy. She said gently, "Last night it wasn't like that, little man. Or did I dream something nobody else dreamed?"

"That was last night," I said. "A hell of a long century ago."

She still smiled. She started to come over to me. She got herself up out of the chair in one of those breathless movements like fog swirling. And then the picture stopped like a broken film lying motionless before the vision cameras. She'd suddenly seen what I had seen too: the door panel was sliding back.

I jerked the heat gun from under my shoulderpit. "All the way in!" I snapped. "Fast!"

THERE WERE two of them. The same ones who'd picked me up before. And it might have been the same scene repeating itself except that the background was different and their Security uniforms weren't quite as fresh and unwrinkled as before.

The tall one said carefully, "A heat gun, Joe. He puts a heat gun on us. He busts out of the cell, swipes our ship, piles up a few thousand miles on it and then sticks us up with a heat gun."

He was talking for the effect. I jerked the gun at him and barked, "In! Hands flat at your sides. One move or even two doesn't change the picture a damned bit from where I stand."

He didn't like that. He stepped to the center of the room and stopped. His short partner did the same. His short partner looked like he wanted to cry.

"Say it," I rapped.

The tall one nodded. "Sure, Smith. Like I told you before. You're a reasonable man. You're going to drop the gun and you're coming back to the

booking room with us and we're all going to have a nice chat with Crooner."

"The hell you say," I said. I watched sweat begin to run on the short one's forehead. "Listen to this, this is different. You two aren't going anywhere. You're going to take two heat pellets from this gun of mine and you're going to make a mess melting all over the floor at your feet."

The short one didn't like my version. He croaked weakly, "Hey, I got a wife and four kids."

"I'll cry when I get a minute," I said. "Frederic Claws isn't dead, has never been dead, probably won't ever die for years and years yet. His kind don't."

The tall one looked worried now. The short one was too busy breathing and worrying to do anything else. The redhead said suddenly. "I'll get their guns, little man."

"You'll stay where you are!" I rapped. She bit her lips, stopped dead, didn't say anything else.

I said, "We'll now lean carefully over and take our shoes off." I jerked my gun when I said it.

The short one leaned over fast. He didn't know what would follow but at least he had this one small breathing spell. He took off his shoes. The tall one did the same but much slower.

"And our socks." I watched. "And our pants."

"Hey, little man," said the redhead.

"You can go over to the wall and face it and stay there," I said. "March."

I WAITED until she did it. I didn't take my eyes from the two in their bare feet. "Now," I said. Their pants dropped. They stepped out of them. "And now we'll be extremely careful while we remove our jackets, and when we come to the spring clips

under our shoulderpits we'll handle that like it was uranium and we didn't have any gloves on."

They worked carefully. There was rebellion in the tall one's eyes but not quite enough. There was nothing at all in the short one's eyes but terror. The spring clips and guns clattered to the floor. I raised an eyebrow and they kicked them over across the room.

"And now our shirts. And after that our underwear, and when we're all quite naked we'll turn around and trot into the bathroom over there and we'll send up little prayers of gratitude."

A moment later I locked the bathroom door panel behind them and gathered up their clothing and their guns. I turned to the girl.

"We'll go see the Governor now," I said.

She didn't protest, didn't question, didn't do anything but say quietly, "All right, little man, if you're in that much of a hurry, then I suppose it'll just have to be."

"I am," I said. "And it will."

We went downstairs. I dumped the clothing and the guns in the short-wave disposer and left the hotel. The redhead went before me without another word.

THE GOVERNOR'S face looked like ancient parchment under a strong lamp, and his eyes were expressionless orbs as he took in my black eye, my torn mouth, the dried blood on my cheeks. He finally said, "You'd better see a doctor, Mr. Nicholson."

I nodded. "It's time for my shot anyhow. If you don't mind I'd like to put in a call for the stewardess on the ship that brought me in. She's been taking care of me."

"Helen, my dear."

The sleepy girl moved to her monel desks across the room. I said, "We'd better have Croner in here. And your aide Claws."

He moistened his lips, nodded. His old eyes were imperturbable. "Helen," he said.

"And she stays, too," I said.

The sleepy girl jerked as if I'd hit her but she said nothing. The Governor studied her briefly, brought his old eyes were imperturbable. "He'en," his head a half inch. The clock up on the wall made a soft "blip" sound.

Claws came in first. He didn't know what it meant, but he didn't like seeing me. His eyes batted quickly and his Adam's apple rose and fell. The Governor motioned him across the room.

The thin stewardess with the long hypo needle was next. Her lips were grim. She said coldly, "You're six hours overdue for your shot. I won't take the responsibility if anything—"

"Save it," I said. "And save the shot. I don't want it just yet."

She didn't seem to hear. I rapped, "Save it! Stay there, I'll take it in a moment." It stopped her. She looked once at the Governor as if for help. His eyes didn't change expression.

Croner came then. He had a respectful look on his face as even the head of all Security Intelligence should in the presence of the Governor of Mars. He started to say, "You called for me, Your Excellency—?" and then he got a look at me. He barked, "Anybody search this man? He's a murderer. He's a—" and then he saw Frederic Claws. He swallowed hard. He stopped.

I SHRUGGED. It didn't matter one way or another, I had him cold and all he had to do was find out. I took a long breath. This was it, this was what I had suffered for. This was

that one very small, very very particular moment.

"Frederic Claws," I said.

The thin man jumped. His eyes blinked rapidly. I said, "Shake a little, Claws. Your wife who worries so much will want an explanation when she finds out her husband spends his very late night hours not in the office but in a place out near the desert called the *Berenice*. A rooming place."

Eyes went toward the thin man. He was swiping at his lips with a nervous tongue that was pale and thin like the rest of him. I went on: "Last night the Governor's secretary made out a homestead grant to me. She put it in a sealed envelope. You were asked to deliver it on your way home. You did, only you unsealed it first and read it."

The nervous tongue was jumping now and the eyes were fluttering wildly.

I said: "Because of your position in this office you have access to records that deal with things like that. And when you saw the location of my particular grant you knew at once it wasn't just homestead. You asked me if I were going prospecting. You slipped there, you weren't supposed to know that."

He couldn't sweat, his kind is incapable of it. But he could suffer just the same. He looked from me to the Governor. His mouth was dry and open and no sound came out.

"A small matter," I said. "The Governor knows what to do about it." I turned away from him. He was finished, smashed, his career on Mars was done. I looked over at Croner.

"Croner," I said. "I was spaced out here to clear up something funny. Too many homesteaders were selling their grants. Especially the ones who found uranium. If one has a suspicious turn of mind that would indicate somebody

else was buying up these grants, amassing a powerful bloc of natural resources in preparation for something. Maybe this somebody didn't like the Federation of Nations any more. Wanted war, wanted to take over. Like in the old days when nation went against nation and there was no peace ever in the land."

I TOOK a breath. This was the time.

He was going to get it now without delay. I looked at his thick lips, his dark hard eyes, his flared nostrils.

I said: "That would ordinarily fall in your department. The Governor told me the reason why you hadn't been given the assignment. But I didn't believe it. I don't think he intended me to believe it. I think there was another reason, such as because you were the one who'd bought up all these grants."

I looked at the Governor. His eyes were still the inscrutable things they'd been ever since I came into the office. He nodded slowly, said slowly: "Precisely, Mr. Nicholson. We have the proof of that. What we wanted was somebody else, somebody bigger. Croner, from this instant on consider yourself under arrest and prepare yourself for trial on the grand treason machines on Earth."

Something came into Croner's eyes. He was a big man and big men don't go down easy. I watched him, and when he made the lunge I took out my heat gun.

"Uh-uhh," I said. "Not today."

His hands froze in mid-air and there was something horrible in his face. He was two inches from the Governor's throat and it might as well have been two miles.

Administration guards took him out. The Governor was smiling very thinly now and looking as pale as the

sands of the deserts. He said softly, "Go on, Mr. Nicholson."

"You thought there was someone bigger," I said. "That's what you were after, for it stood to reason Croner wouldn't have the money himself to buy out one hundred and two grants. Only that wasn't it at all. He did have help, but not that kind. He didn't buy any grants, he didn't need to. He offered rich retirement back on Earth if they'd sign over to him. The most he probably delivered was a one-way ticket on a space ship. And if they refused to sign there was always the heat gun and the shifting sands out on the desert."

THE GOVERNOR didn't say anything to that. He folded his very old, very bony hands in his lap. I turned away from him, turned to the monel desks. The redhead wasn't breathing. She wasn't sleepy either. There'd be other times for that. I went over to her, went over between her and the stewardess. I said, "Before I go on I think I'd like my acclimatizing shot. As I remember, I'm several hours overdue."

The stewardess nodded. She got out her hypo. She brought it up. She held it in her right hand and with her left she rolled up my sleeve. She squeezed my wrist until the vein showed and then she brought down the needle and poised it over the spot.

"Shouldn't there be something in that thing besides air?" I asked softly. "That many c.c.'s in the blood stream is fatal."

At first she didn't get it. Her hand paused but there was no recognition on her thin face at first. It was as though someone had interrupted her in her routine duty by perhaps asking her the time of day. Like that. And then it simply wasn't as elementary as that at all and the skin

on her cheek bones pulled back tightly and a muscle in her neck twitched. Her thin hand made a fist around the cylinder of the hypodermic and she brought it up and slashed downward with it as though she were stabbing a wild animal with a ceremonial sword.

But she never reached me, for the redheaded sleepytime girl at that instant picked up one of the recording machines and smashed it down on the thin woman's skull.

There was a bitter little scream in the air, but only for an instant. And after that there was nothing again but the tiny "blip" of the clock on the wall. The stewardess went down and the hypodermic rolled an inch or two on the floor.

I SIGHED. I looked at the redheaded girl. I sighed over what might have been. Then I shook my head. Frederic Claws hadn't moved, he was dying over and over again. The Governor's eyes were as inscrutable as ever.

I said wearily, "I didn't know at first. I made a large noise as soon as I got into town to call attention to myself, but I had no idea until later on in the evening after Claws had knocked me out. I thought at first it was him then. But I had to change that when I thought a little more about it.

"The stewardess had previously asked me which was my real name, Nicholson or Smith. That made me wonder. And the next day when I got back to the hotel after spending half the night out on the sands she was waiting up in my room. The grant was in my room where I had left it. She had unsealed it, sealed it again, and called Croner. The two of them were in this together. He arranged to get me on a fake murder charge in

order to give them time to check on my grant. But it wasn't good enough, I got out to the property and the man Croner had hired was still there. Waiting for me, in fact."

I stopped. There didn't seem to be anything else. The Governor waited politely for me to go on. The clock made its "blip" sound.

I sighed, said, "Your Excellency, I don't blame you for getting the secretary to check on me. I don't blame you for that. There are times when loyalty seems a thing nobody's heard about."

He rationed me a spare smile. Then he looked at the redhead and smiled at her too. After that there was nothing to do but go back to the hotel and sit around and wait for my check to come through.

I saw her a few times after that. A few hundred times. Her kisses were something out of this planet and her eyes were the sleepy kind that makes your blood scream in your veins. She didn't want me to leave Mars. She didn't just let me guess it, she told me so. But finally my check for twenty thousand dollars came through

and, the week before the annual winds began to rake hot and burning across the endless deserts, I took off.

SHE WAS at the cradle with me. Until the final buzzer sounded she was at my side, her eyes still sleepy, still carrying on with the old old promises. And when the buzzer did finally let go for the final warning she curled her arms tightly around my neck for the last time, and two hot little tears ran down her eyes and she whispered urgently in my ear: "Come back again, little man, come back!"

The planet was a yellow pumpkin in the sky that was gradually getting smaller and smaller as the liner hissed out into space. I sat at the port and looked down at it. Something was nagging at me and wouldn't let go, and it finally made sense.

Who in hell wants to be married to a woman who calls him her *little man* for the rest of his natural days? Certainly not me. I'm six feet to the inch and I weigh one-ninety-five on a cold day stripped down to my birthday suit.

THE END

ATOMIC SLOW DOWN...?

IT IS surprising—and unfortunate—that atomic energy hasn't been given the green light. Private scientists, persons outside the atomic energy organizations, have frequently written in glowing terms of the things atomic energy could accomplish. But there seem to be numerous practical results. True, atomic engines for submarines are being built, and there is the promise of such a machine for aircraft, but notoriously silent is the subject of atomic energy for electric power. The question is, "Why?"

At a recent meeting of the American Chemical Society, several scientists made it clear that these "brakes" on atomic energy—applied—were being put on by oldsters, conservative scientists, who, though in authority, were really out of the swim. It is bad enough to have inertia

in business and industry, but nothing is more stubborn or stupid than a stubborn scientist. Frequently, first-rate scientists "shoot their wad", so to speak, on one project which makes them famous; thereafter they stagnate, usually in some sort of administrative position.

The speaker making these accusations called for new blood, enthusiastic men who would take the miracle of atomic physics—and produce! What is needed, he pointed out, is a handful of inspired, enthusiastic fanatics who are determined to put atomic energy on a practical paying basis. In view of the furor created by these remarks, it means that the use of atomic energy for electrical power generation is that much nearer. The future may have been advanced by a decade or two!

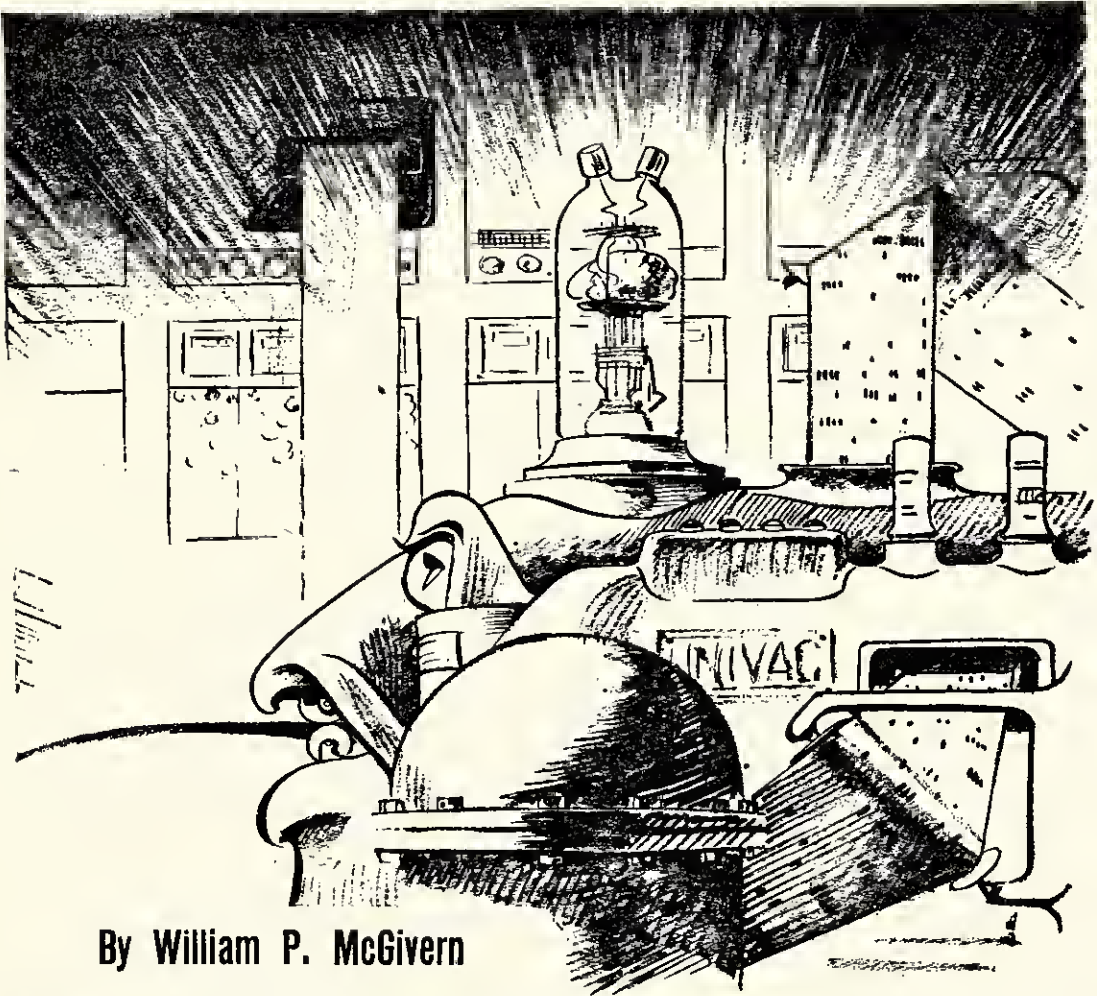
—E. Bruce Yaches

THE MACHINE THAT KNEW TOO MUCH



The ax was an unscientific, but very satisfying answer.

The machine was supposed to solve mathematical problems beyond all human ability, but its first answer was: Keep a close eye on that Mr. Karrick



By William P. McGivern

“YOU THINK I’m crazy,” I shouted at them suddenly. “I can tell. You don’t believe a word I’m saying!”

The doctor, Campbell his name was, smiled at me in a way I didn’t like. It was an understanding smile. That was the trouble. It was *too* understanding. “Now, don’t excite yourself, Mr. Daly,” he said. “You are the only one who has used the word ‘crazy’. We are after all the facts, and it will help us if you relate your story in a calm and orderly fashion.”

“‘Facts’” Karrick said with a

sneer in his voice. “That’s an odd word to describe his hallucinations, I must say.”

“It never liked you, it hated you,” I shouted at him. “That’s why—”

“If you please, gentlemen!” Doctor Campbell removed his steel-rimmed glasses and eyed Karrick sternly. “I am in charge of this interview, Mr. Karrick. If I need your assistance I shall ask for it. In the meanwhile, if that is understood clearly by everyone else here, I should like Mr. Daly to continue with his story. Please start from the beginning, Mr. Daly.”

I took a long breath and tried to relax. The doctor was a good egg, and I felt that he was on my side. Not that he believed me any more than the others did, but he was willing to listen, and that was something.

I was all alone on my side of the table. The doctor was directly across from me and Karrick was on his right, sneering and superior as always. My ex-boss, Mr. Goldson, was on the doctor's left, looking worried and unhappy. I felt sorry for him because he was a fine man, and had always treated me decently. The uniformed cop in the doorway didn't count. He was a large, bored-looking young man who obviously thought the best way to handle this would be to clap me into the nut house. That's what everybody wanted to do, I guess. Everybody but Goldson, who had lost most in this deal, and he had held out for a psychiatric examination. He didn't want me to be railroaded. Crazy as my story sounded, and as costly as my actions had been to him, he was still standing behind me and insisting that I be given a fair shake.

"All right, I'll start over again," I said.

IT WAS A Monday morning when the machine arrived (I told them) and I was just as happy as everybody else in the section that we finally had an electronic computator to help us with our statistical calculations. I'm an actuary for an insurance company, you know, and that job requires a vast amount of mathematical and computation. We'd been doing it the hard way until the machine arrived—that is, we did the work ourselves. Supposing the premium section wants to raise or lower the rates on men of thirty-five, who are single, have no bad habits, but take plane trips two or three times a year. Well, that would be a simple one, I guess. Our section

could work it out in a week or two.

But take a really tough one. Like this. What's the life expectancy of a two-year-old boy in the event of crop failures in the 1960's, say, and underground existence because of atom wars, and so forth? Well, that's more difficult, full of imponderables, as you can easily see, and our section would be at it for weeks.

We weren't afraid of the work, understand. But it was useless work, like pulling a plow around a field and telling the tractor people that you were getting along fine, thanks, and didn't need their help. That was Karrick's attitude, I have to say. He was the office manager, and Goldson was the divisional superintendent. Karrick never heard of the Emancipation Proclamation judging from the way he treated the statistical section and everyone else in the office. He liked to have everyone bent over his desk eight hours a day, too busy to step over to the cooler for a glass of water. Karrick never worried about whether the work was necessary, or if there was an easier, more efficient way of doing it, no sir! As long as he had *your* nose to the grindstone that was fine.

Well, because of the way he felt, he kept telling Mr. Goldson that we didn't need an electrical computator. Don't baby them, he always said. But Mr. Goldson, being a smart and human man, finally overrode Karrick and ordered the best machine on the market for the statistical section. Well, that machine was a marvel. It was big and capable-looking, in a nice shiny brown-metal cabinet, and somehow it just *looked* as if it could handle anything that came its way. Karrick, though, didn't like it right from the start, I suppose because it represented the fact that Mr. Goldson had ignored his recommendations.

That's why Karrick stuck it away in a dark corner of the office.

At this point in my story, Karrick burst out laughing.

"Now see here," he said in his sarcastic fashion, "I think you're going too far, Willy. I may be all you say, a slave-driver and so forth, but I'm not the sort to persecute an innocent machine."

The cop snickered at this, thereby displaying the measure of his intelligence, and Mr. Goldson looked pained. The doctor looked at Karrick again and said, "Let me repeat, Mr. Karrick, I am in charge of this discussion."

"Very well," Karrick said, still smiling. He acted as if he'd scored a big point.

"WELL (I WENT on), we got onto how to run the machine in a hurry. It was really simple. Simon was very cooperative right from the start. He—"

"Simon?" the doctor interrupted, frowning.

Karrick suppressed a laugh, and said in an even voice, "That was Willy's name for the machine, Doctor."

The doctor didn't reprimand him this time. He stared at me, massaging his chin thoughtfully. "Ah...you called the machine Simon, Mr. Da'y?"

"That's right," I said miserably. I knew how it sounded, of course. But that machine *needed* a name. It was more than a machine. "It wanted to be called Simon," I said, "but that's getting ahead of myself."

The doctor smiled at me. He looked a little nervous, I thought. "Well, tell the story the way you think best," he said.

"Okay," I said.

After a couple of days (I continued), Si—the machine—was doing as

much work as the whole section could have turned out in months. You know how those machines work, I suppose. You put all the essential but uncomputed data in one end of them, set the dials and switches, and the machine goes to work, doing problems in seconds that would take a crew of mathematicians months to solve. Then, when the machine has it all doped out, the results come spitting out the other end on narrow cardboard strips. The first time I knew that something was wrong—right, I probably should say—was when I got one of those strips with my name on it.

I was at my desk and Molly McGuire, one of the pool secretaries, brought me the computed data from the machine. It was a problem I'd been working on, of course, so I started to look at the results immediately. But something on the top of the figures caught my eye. It was a little stenciled message. It said: "Here you are, Willy."

Well, naturally I thought this was a joke, you know, something the boys had done, but then I began to get other messages and I realized that Simon was actually...ah...communicating with me.

"Other messages?" the doctor said. "Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Daly, but to what did those messages pertain?"

"They were personal, chiefly."

"You have saved them, I presume."

"...No, I haven't."

"Why not, Mr. Daly?"

"Well, they were personal, as I said, and wouldn't be of interest to anyone else." I knew this sounded weak, and I could see Karrick's grin, and Mr. Goldson's solemn frown.

"Perhaps you could tell us about the messages then," the doctor said.

"Well, sure. Mostly they were just

friendly notes, gossip, things like that. Simon told me that Karrick played favorites in the office, which I knew of course. Also, he told me that Mr. Simington was going to quit and take a government job, and—"

"Before Mr. Simington quit, he told you this?" the doctor said. He caught himself and said hurriedly, "I mean, the *machine* told you this, Mr. Daly?"

"That's right. Simon knew what was in the air, you know. That's why he warned me about Molly, and the way Karrick was acting toward her. Simon said—"

"**M**UST I LISTEN to these wild accusations?" Karrick said in a bored voice. "I think Mr. Daly's sanity is no longer a moot point. I think—"

"Now, now," the doctor said easily, "let's keep our tempers, please. As a matter of fact, Mr. Karrick, there was no accusation in what Mr. Daly said. No one has accused you of anything as yet, to my knowledge."

"I know what he's leading up to," Karrick said, but the doctor's point had been a good one and Karrick looked ruffled. "He's got a lot of resentments against me, and he's going to claim this machine said them, you just watch."

"Very well. Continue, Mr. Daly," the doctor said, nodding at me. "You were talking about someone named Molly. Is she the person you mentioned before? The pool secretary?"

"Yes, that's right," I said. "Well, Simon kept telling me that Molly was a wonderful girl and that I should do something about it. I *knew* she was all Simon said, Doctor, but I was a little shy, I guess you'd call it. Molly is a brunette, Doctor, with long, shining hair, and she's very smart and intelligent, and her dispo-

sition is wonderful. She's got a beautiful figure, too, and very neat ankles. She's outside right now, you *know*, and if you want to verify any of this—"

"No, I think I may safely take your description of her as accurate," the doctor said with a small smile. "Now, how does she figure into this account of yours?"

"I'm coming to that. Simon kept warning me about Karrick. He kept saying that if I didn't do something about Molly, Karrick would move in on her. Of course, I was afraid of that, because Karrick was already up to his usual tricks. Keeping her late, you know, and then suggesting dinner as a sort of bribe to cut the work short. We call him 'Leo the Lecher' at the office, and he—"

"Willy, is this your idea or the machine's?" Karrick said coolly.

"Well, it seemed to occur to both of us at the same time," I said, and I saw that it was a lame answer.

Karrick looked at the ceiling and whistled soundlessly.

The doctor frowned. From that point I had the feeling he'd joined the opposition. "Now, Mr. Daly," he said, "let's examine what you've told us so far in connection with the machine's communications. Am I correct in stating that, except for certain items of neutral information, the machine's animus was directed solely against Mr. Karrick?"

"Well, I guess you could say that," I said.

"I see. In fact, the sum of the machine's communications with you concerned misconduct on Mr. Karrick's part, his unfitness for his job, and his designs on this girl whom you admire. Is that correct?"

"I guess so," I muttered.

"I see." The doctor paused, glanced

at Mr. Goldson, and raised his eyebrows.

"There's the part about Molly," I said. "I haven't told you that yet."

Mr. Goldson nodded slightly and the doctor looked at me. "Well, please tell us about that then, Mr. Daly."

"WELL, ONE night about nine o'clock I went down to the lobby of our building and there was Molly waiting for me. She smiled and said something about being right on time, and I said on time for what? That made her a little angry. She showed me a cardboard strip from Simon, and on it there was a message asking Molly to meet me in the lobby at nine. It was a nice message, well-written and clever, and I guess Simon knew no girl could resist it. Anyway, Molly hadn't.

Of course I saw right away what had happened. Simon had taken over like Miles Standish—or John Alden maybe—to help me win Molly. I should have known something was up because that night Simon had given me wrong answers three times in a row just to make sure I stayed in the office until nine. He was a clever character, you know. At ten of nine he spat out the correct results, and I put on my hat and coat and took the elevator to the lobby. Well, realizing all this, I was able to pretend I'd written the note. Molly and I had a late dinner and went dancing. We had a wonderful time, Doctor. And that was just the start of it. We became very good friends. I would have asked her to marry me, but Karrick turned me down flat on a raise, and I just couldn't see my way clear to asking Molly to marry me."

"I see," the doctor said quietly. "Now, as far as you know, Mr. Daly, did anyone but you and Molly ever receive any communications from the

machine? That is, communications of a personal nature."

"I don't think so."

"Very well. Now, another point: these cardboard strips from the machine, they were brought to your desk by a secretary, I assume. Is that correct?"

"Yes, usually."

"You say 'usually'. I infer that they were occasionally brought to you by someone else. Is that inference correct?"

"Well, sure. You see, it worked like this: I'd have a problem in the machine, let's say, and I'd go back to my desk to work at something else until Simon finished it. Well, when it was finished a secretary might bring it over to me, or one of the fellows from my section would see it and tell me it was ready. Sometimes, if the fellow was right at the machine waiting for something of his own, he'd pick up my cardboard and bring it to me. There wasn't any iron-bound schedule, you see. There should be, but Karrick—"

"Now, let's don't get away from the point," the doctor said. "As I understand it, quite a few people saw these cardboard strips in the normal course of the day. Secretaries, fellow workers in your section, and so forth. Now, how did they know that a certain slip belonged to you and not to someone else?"

"Why, they knew what I was working on, of course," I said.

"I see. They looked at the strip, saw that it was yours, and then brought it to you. Is that right?"

"That's right," I said.

THERE WAS a long silence. Everyone was looking at me steadily. The doctor coughed. "Mr. Daly, we have questioned every one in the office carefully on this point. I think I

should tell you that none of them ever saw anything like a personal message to you on these strips. How would you explain that?"

"Well, they didn't look for it," I said.

"Yet they *did* look at the strips carefully enough to assure themselves that they belonged to you." The doctor said this very gently.

"Maybe it was a coincidence," I said weakly.

Karrick seemed to be trying not to laugh. He let everyone see that he was trying *very* hard not to laugh.

The doctor lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. His manner had changed, I could tell. He wasn't analyzing information from an adult; now he was playing a game with a child. "All right, let's go on a bit," he said, smiling. "Mr. Daly, just for argument's sake, let's assume the machine *didn't* send you those messages. Can you think of any other explanation for them? That is to say, where did they come from, where could they *possibly* have come from, if they didn't come from the machine?"

I shook my head. "I couldn't even guess," I said. "But I *know* they came from Simon."

"Just so, just so," the doctor said easily. "This is merely for argument's sake, Mr. Daly. You can't guess, you say, where they might have come from. Is that right?"

"Of course."

There was another long pause. Finally the doctor glanced at Karrick with a smile. They were friends now, on the same, sane side of the fence. I was on the other side—separated from them, they were sure, by the high barrier of reality and reasonableness. "Now Mr. Karrick," the doctor said, "perhaps you can help us at this point. I will put the same

question to you that I put to Mr. Daly. Where might those messages have come from, if they didn't come from the machine?"

"I believe I can answer that," Karrick said. He fingered his thin black mustache. "You see, those cardboard strips from the machine are in stock in the office. Ready to be used, that is. They're perfectly blank, you understand. Anyone could cut a stencil the size of those strips and put any crazy message he wanted on it. Except for a few little differences, it would look just like it popped right out of the machine."

"Thank you," the doctor said quietly. He looked down at his hands for a few seconds. "That explanation didn't occur to you, Mr. Daly?" he asked.

"Well, no," I said. "But it's not *the* explanation. Those messages I got came from Simon. Karrick's just come up with one of his typical glib alibis. He can explain anything away. Ask him why he didn't like Simon. Go ahead, ask him."

"There's no need to shout at me," the doctor said good-humoredly. "I'll ask him anything you want me to, Mr. Daly. Mr. Karrick, why didn't you like...ah...Simon?"

NOW IT was becoming a joke, I saw. Karrick smiled and fingered his mustache. "Doctor, I don't think anybody could say I didn't like...ah...Simon. The thing is, the machine just never worked properly. I have here," he said, patting a briefcase, "my correspondence with the International Computing Machine company, the people who supplied us with the machine. I asked for a checkup the first week the machine came. Its incidence of error was too high for it to be of any use to us. They sent out their repairman, who found

a few things wrong with it. But it never worked properly. In—"

"Simon didn't like you," I said. "That's why it wouldn't work for you."

Karrick went on without even looking at me. "In the company's last letter to me they agreed to send us a new machine and take ours back to their laboratory for a thorough inspection."

"You kicked Simon, didn't you?" I shouted at Karrick. "Deny that now, you—you—" I couldn't think of anything bad enough to call him, so I slumped down in my chair and stared at my hands. I was disgusted. Okay, they thought I was crazy. So I was crazy! What difference did it make? I knew what I knew.

"What's this?" the doctor said, glancing at Karrick. "You kicked the machine?"

Karrick grinned, but there was a touch of color in this thin face. "Well, that's putting it strongly," he said.

"Supposing you put it accurately then," the doctor said.

"Of course. One day—I suppose this is what he's referring to—the machine stopped working completely. I thought perhaps there was some dust in one of the gears, so I tapped the side of the machine with my foot, thinking to dislodge the dust."

"Hah!" I said. "And *did* you dislodge the dust?"

"Well, no," Karrick said, rubbing the side of his nose. "It was something else, obviously."

"So you kicked it again and dented the casing," I said. "And then you told Mr. Goldson that it had happened while it was being moved. How about *that*, Mr. Karrick?"

I guess I was shouting again because the doctor looked at me and made a little shush-ing noise with his lips.

"Frankly, I don't see the point of going into all these tiresome details," Karrick said.

The doctor leaned toward Mr. Goldson and whispered something to him. Mr. Goldson nodded. The doctor looked at me and said, "Mr. Daly, I would like to talk to this girl of yours, Molly. Would that be all right with you?"

"Certainly," I said. "I told you to get her an hour ago."

THE DOCTOR smiled at me, nodding to the cop who went outside. In just a few seconds Molly came in, looking half-scared and half-mad, and just as pretty as she always did. She came right to me and put her hand on my shoulder. "Don't you worry about a thing, Willy," she said, glaring at the three men on the other side of the table. "Whatever they say, I know you did what you thought was best. And I know you're not crazy."

The doctor cleared his throat. "Molly, my name is Doctor Campbell," he said. "I would like to say right at the start that no one here is particularly concerned about craziness—Willy's, or even our own." He smiled slightly and Molly relaxed a little. "Our interest at this time is getting at the facts. You can help us, and Willy, if you care to. Will you cooperate with us, Molly?"

"Well, certainly," Molly said in a puzzled voice. She had come in prepared to fight, but the doctor had avoided all that and got her on his side.

"We're interested in a certain message you received a few weeks ago," the doctor said. "The message, you may recall, asked you to meet Willy in the lobby at nine o'clock. Where and how did you get that message?"

"It was in the machine," Molly

said. "Right on the slot where the final data comes out. I was standing by the machine and saw it. I picked it out, planning to take it to whoever it belonged, but I saw my name on it."

"I see. Who sent that message to you?"

Molly looked surprised. "Why, Willy, of course."

There was a little silence. Karrick looked smug. The doctor spread his hands flat on the table. "I see. You were sure it came from Willy, then, the minute you saw it? How were you sure, Molly?"

"Goodness, it was addressed to me, and it had his name on it," Molly said. "What else would I need?"

"Yes, of course. But it was *in* the machine, wasn't it?"

"Of course. That was just a little joke of Willy's, I figured. He cut a message on the stencil, and then put it on one of those cardboard strips, I guess. Then, when he knew I was going over to the machine, he beat me there and left the message."

"Now, bear with me, Molly," the doctor said. "You didn't assume, even for an instant, that the machine sent you the message all by itself?"

Molly stared at him. "Say, who's supposed to be crazy here anyway?"

"I think that will be all," the doctor said. "You've been very helpful, Molly."

"Did I say the right thing, Willy?" Molly said earnestly.

"Sure, I guess so," I muttered.

"I'll wait for you outside," she said, and walked out of the room. The doctor watched her leave, a sad, fatherly-looking expression on his eyes. When the door closed he glanced at me.

"Does her testimony change your mind in any way, Mr. Daly?"

"Why should it? She thought I

wrote the note all along. I *told* you that. I didn't explain to her that Simon wrote it."

"Why not?"

"I guess I wanted to take the credit for it myself," I said.

"I see." Again the doctor leaned toward Mr. Goldson and talked to him in a whisper. Goldson looked unhappily at me and nodded. The doctor straightened up and faced me, looking very thoughtful and business-like.

"MR. DALY," he said, "as you know I am a psychiatrist. I am supposed to know something about why people do certain things. Things which are not motivated in a conscious manner, that is. I'm no miracle worker. It would take me many months of work with you to determine the hidden factors which are causing you to behave in an unrealistic manner, a manner which is harmful to yourself and to your friends. However, in this brief talk I have reached a few conclusions. I may be wrong, of course. You are under no obligation to listen to me, in any case. I am here at Mr. Goldson's request, not yours. However, if you wish me to, I will tell you what my conclusions are at this time."

"Go ahead," I said. "You're going to say I'm crazy. That's all right. I know I'm not."

"Very well," the doctor said. "Mr. Daly, you are suffering from an obsession. That obsession takes the nature of attributing human, sympathetic tendencies to what is in actuality a collection of gears and drive shafts. You require sympathy, obviously, and, not getting it in the real world, you have invented a *thing* which gives you the compassionate sympathy you need. Also, you have used this thing to pay off your

animosity toward your office superior, Mr. Karrick. You do not like Karrick. That is obvious. He is incompetent, unlikable, a slave-driver. He hounds you, he tried to make advances to a girl you esteem very highly, and he refused to give you a raise in order that you might marry this girl. Therefore you dislike him. Therefore your ally, your sympathetic friend, the machine, dislikes him, also.

"You are convinced that Mr. Karrick has wronged you. You believe he has also wronged your friend, the machine. That is why you accuse him of putting it in a dark corner of the office, of kicking it, and so forth. Mr. Karrick probably represents something to you also, a stern father, an un-loving mother. You are striking back at these objects of your infantile hate by striking at Karrick. However, as you were not strong enough to attack your mother or father, neither are you strong enough to attack Karrick. So you have invented an antagonist, a foe worthy of what you feel to be his insuperable qualities. You have pitted a formidable, tireless, almost human machine against Karrick who is, in reality, the image of someone who hurt you grievously when you were an infant."

"So I'm crazy," I said. "Okay, I'm crazy."

"I have not used that word," the doctor said, spreading his hands out in an odd, pleading gesture. "Please get it out of your head. You're ill, Mr. Daly, ill and disturbed. You need care and assistance. Please forget this medieval idea that people who suffer from mental illnesses are 'crazy'."

"All right, I'll stop calling myself crazy," I said. "Mr. Goldson, I'm going to pay for the machine, you'll see. Don't you worry about that. I had to do it, but I'll pay for it."

MR. GOLDSON shook his head quickly. I thought he was going to cry. "We won't talk about that now, Willy," he said. "I have had to make charges, you know, the insurance, and everything. The police will take you to the station. I will come with you and take care of the bond. Then you and I will find a hospital for you, perhaps some place Dr. Campbell can recommend, to look after you until you are well."

"That's very decent of you, Mr. Goldson," I said. Everyone stirred in his chair. No one wanted to be the first to stand up and admit that it was all over, that I was on my way to jail and then to an asylum.

The doctor said, "Willy, why did you destroy the machine? Frankly, that's one thing that doesn't fit into my analysis of your trouble."

"Simon wasn't feeling well," I said. "He knew something was wrong. There were some mistakes when he was put together. He was always getting headaches from overwork. So he asked me to put him out of his misery. I got the axe from the fire locker in the hall, and took the plate off Simon's top and smashed all the insides. That's all there was to it, Doctor. It was all I could do for a friend."

Karrick got to his feet then, putting an end to the conference. We all filed out of Mr. Goldson's office into the large main office of the company. It was late afternoon and a mellow orange sunlight poured in over the desks and cabinets. The people who were still working glanced at us, and then bent back over their desks. Molly was standing about ten feet in front of me, clenching and unclenching her hands.

"Willy, is it all right?" she said.

"I've got to go to the police sta-

tion," I said. The big cop was holding my arm.

"It's just a formality," Mr. Goldson said hastily, as Molly began to weep.

I looked around, saying goodbye to it all, to my desk, to the file cabinets, to the friends I'd made here in ten years. Finally, I turned and looked at Simon for the last time. He was in pretty bad shape, all banged up like that, but there was something about him that commanded your respect. He seemed to be glowering in the corner, as cocky as always, ready to tell you to go to hell if he didn't like you, or work himself sick for you if he decided you were a right guy.

"Willy," Molly said in a high, breathless voice, "there's something in the data receptacle."

EVERYONE jumped slightly. I started to grin. So I was crazy, was I? So they didn't believe in Simon. Not much they didn't. The idea that he might have a last word to say was enough to make them jump like scared rabbits. Doctor Campbell jumped just as high as anybody, I noticed.

He cleared his throat. "You startled me, Molly," he said.

We all stood there in the pale, orange sunlight staring at the white cardboard strip that Simon seemed to be holding in his grinning mouth.

"Probably a blank that someone left there," Karrick said with an uneasy little laugh.

"Let's see," I said.

Doctor Campbell shrugged. The eerie little moment had passed. For an instant we had seen something so far beyond our experience that we had stared at it with the eyes of frightened children. Now that interval was gone. We put it down for what it had been, our overactive imaginations at work.

"I'm late as it is," Doctor Campbell said. "I really must be getting on."

"Wait a minute," I said. "First of all, that strip wasn't there when we went into Mr. Goldson's office. Right?"

After a pause the cop said, unexpectedly, "That's right, Sir. I was the last one to go into the office, and I looked back at the machine just before I closed the door. There was no paper anywhere about the machine then." He scratched his big head. "You know, my old Irish grandmother used to say—"

"Never mind *that*," Doctor Campbell said, rather crossly. "I had an old Scotch grandmother who could undoubtedly match yours in silly stories of gremlins and druids. The fact is—"

"Hey, everybody!" I shouted to the office. "Have any of you been near the machine since I went into Mr. Goldson's office?"

After a moment of head-scratchings and head-shakings everyone said no.

"Therefore, that message came while we were in Mr. Goldson's office," I said. "I suggest we take a look at it."

"Very well, we'll take a look at it," Doctor Campbell said, in a dry, exasperated voice.

I hurried to Simon and picked the message out of his wide mouth. It was short and sweet. I read it as I walked back to the group. It said: "Willy, this is an effort, banged-up as I am. But these fools want proof. They can't cure the common cold, they don't know why flowers grow, but they *know* I'm just a machine. Okay! Tell them to check Karrick's petty cash balance against what's on hand in the till. That balance was run at noon—*two hours after you*

broke me to pieces. Best to you and Molly. Simon."

I GAVE IT to Goldson. He read it through twice, and there was a sudden film of perspiration on his forehead. Without looking up, he said slowly, "Officer, there will be no charges against Mr. Daly."

"I knew it," the cop said, with a vigorous shake of his head. "I bought his story all along. My Irish grandmother—"

"Mr. Karrick," Mr. Goldson said, "I wish to see you in my office, *with* your petty cash accounts."

Karrick wet his lips and his face went suddenly white. "Mr. Goldson, I needed three hundred dollars last week, and I thought—"

"In my office, please," Mr. Goldson said sternly.

Doctor Campbell took the cardboard strip from Mr. Goldson and read it slowly, moving his eye from word to word as if they were things he had never seen before in his life. When he finished he gave it to Mr. Goldson. "I don't know:..." He wet his lips. "That is to say, I don't see how..." He shook his head and rubbed his jaw. "Well," he said. "I—I really must be going."

He put a hand on the cop's arm and together they walked toward the

wide, double doors. I heard Doctor Campbell saying earnestly, "Officer, there *was* one thing my grandmother used to tell me repeatedly, and I wonder if your grandmother ever told you anything similar. It seems that at certain phases of the moon—" The doors swung shut behind them, cutting off his sentence.

Molly was in my arms then, and we didn't pay any attention to anything else for a while. When I finally looked around I saw that Karrick was gone, and that Mr. Goldson was watching us with a funny smile.

"Willy, your vacation starts today," he said. "Have fun."

"Gee, thanks."

"And one thing. You won't think I'm a slave-driver or anything, but for a while, for a little while anyway, we won't get another machine. You understand, eh?"

"Sure thing," I said. "Maybe if we wait a while we can get another one just like Simon."

Mr. Goldson's expression got even funnier. He started to say something, but his mouth must have been kind of dry, because no words came out. After a bit he patted my arm weakly and hurried into his office.

Molly and I waved a goodbye to everyone in the office, and to Simon, too, and got out of there in a hurry.

MIRACLE OUT OF BROOKHAVEN

THE BROOKHAVEN Laboratories are preparing to put into use the most fantastic proton accelerator conceivable. It is the gigantic "Cosmotron", so named because the particles eventually emitted by it will have energies of over a billion electron volts, a range which will enable men, for the first time, to produce cosmic rays artificially! This achievement alone is extraordinarily significant because, unquestionably, cosmic rays contain within them the clues to the structure of the universe.

The Cosmotron is essentially a huge magnet capable of generating an intensely strong magnetic field. This in turn lit-

erally seizes and whirls the protons up to velocities minutely remote from the speed of light. After the protons have acquired such enormous velocities they are allowed to strike targets of beryllium and copper. The result is an atomic breakdown, in a manner much the reverse of the atomic bomb. This breakdown, it is believed, will be accompanied by the production of cosmic rays, those unknown penetrating particles which come from outer space. Thus, another great advance in atomics will be made.

—Lee Owen

★ ★ ★

SUCKER FROM SPACE

H. B. Hickey

We may conquer all space and rule the universe, but Mr. Barnum's advice will always be remembered and followed Never give a sucker an even break.



He was running from something—they wondered what.

IT ALWAYS rains there now, but they say that California used to be a lovely place. Of course that's ancient history, which interests me not at all. Who ever made a buck out of ancient history?

As far as I was concerned, the whole west coast of Normerica was a stinking bog. I'd never been there and I wouldn't have been putting in there

now except that Chuck Barrett was one of the inhabitants. And Chuck Barrett and I had once been good friends.

For anybody but Chuck I'd not have gone. It was killing a whole day and my time is worth a thousand an hour. What I mean, we'd been *good* friends.

So I told Gurla, my Martian pilot,



to take her on down. Without a beam he had to bring the ship in on manual, but when a Martian is a hot pilot he's plenty hot. We went in through the mist and rain and it was like landing on a featherbed.

"Stay with it," I told Gurla. Gregor and Bianch fell in behind me going out the hatch.

Through the murkiness the town showed small, a sprawl of cheesy plastic construction shimmering dimly. A couple of the local yokels had drifted up and were standing with their mouths open. Well, it was a pretty slick ship at that.

"I'm looking for Chuck Barrett," I said. "Where can I find him?"

"Who?" asked the one I'd spoken to.

He didn't look that dumb. "Catch," I said.

He let the fifty-dollar coin fall at his feet like it was a pebble.

All at once I had the hunch that Ishtahi had known what he was talking about. This was not one of his pipe dreams. Unless I handled it right I wasn't going to see Chuck.

"Look," I said. "I'm an old pal of Barrett's. My name is Dial. Waite Dial."

"That so?" the local mumbled.

"Waite Dial," I repeated. "I know Chuck would want to see me."

"That so?" he said again.

I was just beginning to think oh hell when he opened up a bit. "Haven't seen Barrett in a bit, but maybe someone'll know."

He bobbed his head up and down a couple of times and one of the others turned around and strolled off. The rest of us stood there in the rain.

TEN YEARS is a long time. I was shocked when I saw Chuck. Of course, he'd been middle-aged when we worked together and I'd been al-

most a kid. Naturally it showed more on him.

"Chuck!" I said. "You look great!"

"Don't give me that." He laughed, and all the deep lines in the square face turned up. His hand, though, was as big and hard and warm as I remembered it.

The room had been built for a big man. It was poor but comfortable. The three fellows standing behind Barrett were even bigger than he and their eyes were definitely unfriendly. I had the impression they knew who I was and they didn't like me. I wondered why.

"So what've you been doing?" I demanded.

"Nothing much. A little hunt, little fish." Maybe he thought he was kidding me. "How about you, Waite?"

"Making out."

"So I hear. That's a nice suit you're wearing."

"Thanks." It had cost me a thousand. Why shouldn't it be nice?

"The last time I saw you, you had holes in your pants," Chuck said.

What the—? "Look," I said, "I wasn't ashamed of the holes. I'm not ashamed of the suit."

"Sure?"

"You're damned right I'm sure!"

Somehow, he'd always been able to make me feel like a school kid. Now, with his hair grizzled gray and the slight sloop in his shoulders, he reminded me more than ever of my old man.

"You didn't think I'd spend my life swinging a pick through the asteroid belt, did you?" I demanded. "Making more holes in my pants?"

"It was honest work."

"Ha!" It was all I could think of.

"Ha. Got yourself a whole chunk of the galaxy, I hear," Barrett said. "And the gall to put a sign in every one of your places: 'Never give a

sucker an even break.' ”

“They can't say I don't warn them.” I stuck out my lip at him. “Listen, I remember a few times—”

“I admit I've done some things to be ashamed of,” he said quietly, “but it was an even scrap, at least. Man to man. No crooked tables, no phony dice.”

THERE WAS a pause and for the first time I was aware that someone else had entered the room. I turned around and looked. It was a girl.

I've seen lots of girls, sure. Some of them have had faces and shapes that have made mens' mouths water and women's eyes tear with hopeless envy. But this was different.

This was hair like spun honey in the sunlight, honest brown eyes with an honest twinkle, a mouth so soft it made my knees go soft. I didn't look at her legs; I didn't have to, not after seeing the rest of her.

But none of it a man could rent. Nor buy. I knew that.

“My daughter Dara,” Barrett said. “This is Waite Dial, dear. You've heard me speak of him. How about some coffee?”

She smiled to me and said sure to him. But she didn't leave right then. Somehow, not knowing how much she'd heard, I had to justify myself a little.

“Look, pappy,” I said. “What's the beef? Everyone else is getting his. Why not me too?”

“Not everyone,” Chuck said. “Most are just paying. And paying and paying.”

“Nuts. Over a thousand years ago a man said—”

“... ‘There's one born every minute,’ ” Chuck finished. “You used to say that a lot.”

He sighed deeply and the lines in

his face sagged. “The first race in the galaxy to span the stars. And that's our message: ‘One born every minute’. The sheep and the goats—the sucker and the sharpie. The bribe, the payoff...”

He sighed again. “Our own planet in control of a corrupt few. And now we've taken our corruption and greed and spread it across space.

“Ah, Waite, do you know what the suckers are paying? Do you realize people starve in the midst of potential plenty? Do you know what the burden of taxes is upon the suckers?”

I shrugged. “So what? There've always been suckers and there always will be.”

“Not always!” he said sharply. “There is only so much people can take. And then...”

Aha. There it was.

“So,” I said. “So Ishtahi was right.”

Barrett's eyes suddenly popped wide at that name. The air in the room turned dry as dust. And one of Barrett's big boys took a leap forward that put his lantern jaw just inches from mine.

“I warned you!” he shouted to Barrett, but not taking his eyes off me. “I warned you he was a spy!”

I didn't like his breath in my face and I didn't like the name he gave me. What I'd take from Chuck was one thing. But the yokel had never saved my life, had never carried me through a sandstorm on Demos when I had a busted leg.

But I held my temper.

“You heard me,” I said. “Ishtahi. He told me there was something going on, some kind of underground. And he mentioned a guy named Chuck Barrett.”

That big jaw came close again. “Who mentioned who?” the big guy demanded. “Why, you sneaking stool-pigeon!”

Hell. I wanted no more of that lip wagging in my face. I pushed it away. With my fist.

HE WAS big. He was rough. He went back on his heels. And then he laced me with a right that slammed me across the room against the far wall.

Bells in my head. Stars in my eyes. I came off the wall with just enough vision and sense to yell, "*Hold it!*"

Gregor and Bianch already had their hands out from under their lapels and this big yokel had never been so close to dying since the day he was born. But they held their fire at my shout.

My suit had already got mussed. And now there were blotches of blood on it. What could I lose? I sailed right in.

Maybe Chuck and his boys figured their man could take me. With Gregor and Bianch on the sidelines, nobody interfered.

He got in some good jolts. Once I thought he'd cracked all my ribs. But he was a sucker for a straight left. I let him have three in a row, with plenty of steam behind them. Then I crossed a right below his ear.

He fell flat on his face and after the thud there was a long silence.

Chuck Barrett sighed deeply. "All right. So it proves you can still handle yourself. But what else does it prove?"

"That you're a chump," I told him. "If Ishtahi wanted you he wouldn't have sent me. Not when he's got the secret police of the whole galaxy to throw in here."

Barrett laughed, surprising me. "Oh, I know you wouldn't turn me in, Waite. You've got your own morality, twisted as it is. But you see, Ishtahi can't come after me."

"Why not?"

"He couldn't find me."

"I found you," I said.

"I wasn't running from Waite Dial. No, if Ishtahi fought his way in here I'd be long gone."

I snorted. "Hell, he could blow the whole coast out of existence."

"Not without dreadful consequences. You can't disturb nature quite that much."

I shrugged. "Well, it's your lookout. I've got a pretty good organization of my own, but I wouldn't try to buck Ishtahi. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know the long arm was starting to reach for you."

Barrett got up. He looked down at the big fellow on the floor, who was beginning to stir, and motioned that he be helped.

"Thanks, Waite," Barrett said, raising his eyes to mine. "Thanks a lot. I really mean it."

I COULDN'T help liking him. I'd always liked him. At that moment I almost told him that my games were not really fixed, that I just let it be known they were because the suckers got a bigger kick when they did win.

But I didn't tell him. Instead I said, "You're still a sucker trying to be a revolutionary. Let the other guy look out for himself."

He laughed. "You've got it backwards, boy. The day each of us starts looking out for the other fellow, we won't *have* to look out for ourselves."

Then he got serious again. "Anyway, thanks for the warning. I didn't realize Ishtahi had the finger on me."

That was it. Time to say good-bye. I stuck out my hand and Barrett shook it. I hoped he'd have sense enough to forget his plotting, but in my heart I knew he wouldn't.

"Where to from here?" he asked.

"New Washington," I said. "Got some business. Maybe a day or two. Then back to Arcturus V."

He seemed lost in thought. The lines in his forehead came down to meet at the bridge of his nose while he pondered something.

"New Washington," he mused. "I haven't been there for years." He cocked an eye at me. "Waite, would you do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Well, Dara has never seen New Washington. In fact, she's spent her whole life out here. I think it'd be quite a kick for her—and if it wouldn't be too much trouble..."

I turned around and looked at her. "A privilege and a pleasure," I grinned. "Pack your toothbrush."

One thing I admired about Barrett. He didn't ask me to take good care of his little girl. He didn't ask me to be sure and bring her back safe and sound.

If I were he I think I would have. I wouldn't have trusted me.

FLYING IN a private passenger lane, our speed was limited to a thousand miles an hour. In the two hours it took to make New Washington, on the banks of the Mississippi River, Dara and I had some chance to get acquainted.

She was twenty-three, older than I'd thought, and her mother had died when she was a kid. She admitted to having had a few offers of marriage. Oddly enough, she'd turned them down because she hadn't loved the men. Even more strangely, this information made me feel good.

"And you mean to say you've never been away from the coast?" I asked.

"Never."

"Well, you've got a treat waiting for you."

"I wonder," she said. "I feel excited. And at the same time, knowing what I do, sort of—well, as though I'll be revolted."

"Now wait a second!" I said. "We're going to have a *good* time!"

Dara gave me a wondering look. "You know, Waite, I can't quite make you out. In some ways you seem..." She shook her head. "And yet you act as though you think the world's in fine shape. Even more, as though you *like* the way—"

She was Chuck's daughter all right.

"Look," I said. "I didn't make this setup. I was born into it. I do the best I can."

"But—"

I cut her off. "And never mind what your old man says about me! When you're dealing with roughnecks who think hundred-proof whisky is a sissy's drink, you play it their way. A fifty-fifty shake is too conservative for them. I let them think what they want about my games and they get a real thrill out of bucking me."

I was so wound up I waved a finger under her nose. "And you tell your old man to watch his step or he'll get hurt. There are always a lot of 'little people' who are unhappy and think they can do something about it. But when the 'big people' get ready they'll clamp the lid on."

What goes through a woman's mind when she makes her eyes big and round and makes them say "Is that so?" Dara gave me a full one-minute treatment.

"You've never done any cooking, have you?" she asked.

I tried to think around that one, tried to see what she had concealed behind it. But it was no use. I passed.

"When the pot starts to boil—really boil—you can't put the lid on," she said. "The boiling gets worse, until the whole pot explodes. The only thing to do is take the lid *off*."

"I'll remember that. Next time I do some cooking."

"Please." She put her hand on my

arm. "Dad didn't mean to lecture you. It's just that he's afraid if a crash comes you'll be caught on the wrong side. And he likes you."

"Same reasoning behind your lecture?" I asked.

She saw she'd trapped herself and was a good enough sport to grin. "Like any woman, I'm a born lecturer. Any other motivation is probably unconscious. And I won't answer for my unconscious."

I felt better anyway. I looked at my watch and called Bianch. "How much longer?"

"Ten minutes," he said.

Dara threw a quick glance over her shoulder at the tall dark shadow of a man. She shivered. Her lips barely moved as she whispered, "He looks like a killer."

I suppressed a smile. "Bianch," I called. "Tell me, would you kill anyone?"

Thin eyebrows rose, but his expression didn't change. "Me? Of course not. Unless he killed me first."

Dara chuckled. I didn't. Somehow, it seemed like a good answer. In fact, if I'd given it more thought I could have built a philosophy on it. When Death flails his scythe faster than an electric fan and Life is beyond the blades, a man is quick—or permanently quiet.

REGARDLESS OF what it's built on, New Washington is a terrific sight. From our copter taxi the city lay in shimmering colors beneath us. Rockets blasting from the spaceport made rainbows in the sky. Dara's eyes shone.

But her biggest kick came when she saw the suite I'd taken at the hotel. The walls changed color to harmonize with the colors she wore, and when she stuck her head into the boudoir, exotic perfumes sprayed from hidden places

to complement the scent she used.

"Oh, it's unbelievable," she breathed.

One of the maids curtsied. "Would madam care to bathe?"

"Go ahead," I urged. "Have fun. They run milk through the pipes." I was kidding about the milk, of course. The bath drew distilled water, delicately scented.

"I've got some business that'll take a couple of hours," I said. "Meantime, you can relax. I'll have a shop send up some clothes, so you'll have something appropriate to wear this evening."

"No!"

I stared at her. There was a splotch of color in each cheek. She looked from me to the maids and her eyes fell.

"I mean—how will it look?" she stammered. "People will think I'm—"

"You have a dirty mind," I told her gravely. "People won't think anything."

I left Gregor there and told him to keep an eye on her without being obtrusive. Then Bianch and I took a drop car down to the underground tubes.

"You know," Bianch murmured, "she blushed."

I grinned. A blush in New Washington was as great a rarity as an honest man. The hired help around the hotel would be talking about it for a long time. That suite was usually occupied by a lady friend of some big politician. The luxury got paid for in ways that would make even me blush.

I thought about some of the women I'd known. About the blonde in Ish-tahi's office. That babe had known tricks that— But damn her anyway. Imagine a woman going to bed with a microrecorder tucked in her armpit!

"Hey," Bianch said mildly. We had already arrived. We were in the bright-

ly lit station below the block of steel and concrete which was the heart of Government in the galaxy.

"Stand!"

We stood. Two guards came out of a cubicle beside the armored elevator doors. They frisked us, grunting at the load of armament Bianch gave up. Then they stepped back while we were rayed for possible concealed weapons.

No bells, no red lights. There was one plastic the ray wouldn't detect. Bianch carried a knife made of that plastic.

"You have permits for the guns?"

"Inside coat pocket," I said.

They checked our papers. "What department are you visiting?"

"GSP."

The guard grunted. A visiscreen lit up beside the elevator doors. We were being observed. A woman's voice—not the blonde's—said peevishly: "Yes?"

I recited our names. "To see Colonel Ishtahi."

There was a long silence. Somewhere above us our names were being passed along. If Ishtahi was in he was looking at us.

"Proceed."

HE HAD a huge moon face, as coldly cheerful as the face on the moon. A smile carved in ice set on a ballet dancer's body. And a mind like quicksilver. That was Ishtahi.

"How are you, Waite? Have a nice trip? When'd you get in?"

"Fine. As usual. About half an hour ago."

A buzzer went off on Ishtahi's desk. He said, "What is it?"

"We have been unable to extract any information, sir," a disembodied voice informed him.

"You're a pack of fools. He must have had accomplices."

"Yes, sir."

"You will get their names. Or else

I will give a demonstration of how those machines are to be used. You will be the subjects."

He meant it. I'd heard of Ishtahi's methods of extracting information. They were exquisitely terrible. I imagined his men would do everything in their power to avoid personal demonstrations.

"A bit of trouble," Ishtahi said. He lifted a flower from the vase on his desk and sniffed it delicately. "Your friend Barrett's gang. They're getting bold."

I lifted an eyebrow and he said, "Oh, yes. Very bold."

"You'll get them," I said.

"Naturally. That's my job, isn't it?" Sometimes I had an urge to smash that unchanging, cheerful grin. "What can I do for you, Waite?"

I grinned back at him. "You can stop shooting questions like that at me. Makes me feel like you're reading my mind."

That pleased him. He had his vanities too. "But seriously?"

"You're opening the Deneb sector for exploitation. I want in."

"I thought so. Not in my power to allocate such privileges, you know."

"Yeah. But you could make a recommendation."

"Ummm." He was picking the petals from the flower, very delicately. "I don't know that I'd care to make such a recommendation. You're getting too big, Waite. As a friend, I want to protect you from the dangers of over-expansion."

I made a gesture and he said, "But seriously, Waite. I don't know that I could clear all your people."

"Why not? They're loyal."

"Of course. But question: to whom?" His eyes flickered to Bianch, who stood motionless near the door. "A citizen's first loyalty is to his government, not his employer."

"I'll vouch for my men. You know I've always done more than I had to, contributed more than my share."

You never knew who was listening in to what. It was a nice way to remind Ishtahi he was getting a neat payoff.

"Besides," I said, "it's easier to deal with one man than with a lot of different ones."

"True. Exactly my point. You already employ a small army. Too many for direct supervision. Why be greedy?"

"I'm not greedy. It's just that..."

I didn't know how to finish. What *did* I want? Not more money. Not more power. All I felt was a driving urge.

"Look. Talk to the man, will you?"

"Your request will be brought to the Director's attention," Ishtahi assured me.

"Could I bring it to him personally?"

The smile was still on Ishtahi's face, but it was frostier. "You know that no private citizen may see the Director."

No. And very few public servants could see him either. Ishtahi could. Maybe five or six more of the inner circle. That was all. They were taking no chances. The man who ran the galaxy was plenty well protected.

"Well, see what you can do."

"Yes. Goodbye now."

Just like that. The interview was over. And I knew I wasn't going to get the Deneb deal. I turned around quickly and started out, not wanting Ishtahi to see the look in my eye. It could have got me liquidated.

GREGOR WAS leaning against the door of Dara's suite when Bianch and I came up. He was chewing on his lip but the ends turned up in a twisted grin, as though he'd burst out in

guffaws if his teeth let go.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Go see." He jerked his head and got himself out of the doorway.

I went in. There were four models, all of them busy packing clothes into sample cases. They looked angry.

Dara was over in a corner, in a huge chair. If she had shrunk any deeper into that chair she'd have been behind it. Her face was rosy red. The earlier blush had been just for practice. This was the real thing.

"What's up?" I demanded.

One of the models swung around to face me. "I've never been so insulted in my life!" she snarled. "Telling me she wouldn't be caught dead in this gown. I'll have you know I'm considered the best breast model in town!"

She probably was. The dress she wore covered every inch of her except for her breasts. And those were perfection.

One of the other models was wearing a creation in black that was glued to her skin, except where it parted to reveal a pair of roseate buttocks.

"Please tell them to go away," Dara pleaded.

"Go away," I said. I greased the departure with a quartet of bank notes.

Once the models were gone Dara sat up straighter and some of the blood drained from her face. She glared at me.

"You did that purposely. You knew—"

"Don't be silly," I said. "How did I know what they'd show you?" I couldn't help a grin. "Don't you like the newest styles? They're designed to show off a woman's best features."

"They're shameful!"

"All right. Wear what you've got on. It fits, it's clean, and everyone in the places we go to will stare at you like you came out of a museum."

"Then we won't go anywhere." She

got up and tossed her head. "I feel contaminated already, anyway."

"Nuts. You came here to see things. You're not going to spend your time in this room."

I grabbed the phone and called for the gown shop. "The lady has lovely ankles, tawny hair and eyes. Everything else has to be played down. Got it?"

They got it. It was their aim to please. As long as a woman would pay for it they'd even give her something to enhance a pimple on the end of her nose.

"That should do it," I said as I disconnected.

I wandered to the window and looked out. Dusk. The lights were coming on.

Suddenly, way out near where the factories were located, a light flared. The light grew into a column of flame. A few seconds later there came a rumble that penetrated even into the room.

Dara looked at me. "What was that?"

I shrugged. "Maybe an accident at one of the power plants."

"There was another accident," Dara said. "About an hour ago." She came over and stared out the window at the red smoke that was rising skyward. "Maybe the pot is starting to boil."

I didn't get a chance to think of an answer to that. Just then Gregor stuck his head in and said I had a visitor.

MANNY MORRIS and I were not friends, but we'd done a lot of business. He not only ran a few places of his own in New Washington, but he also manufactured equipment. I was one of his better customers.

We sort of understood each other. Manny was small and trim and catlike in his movements. No matter how

you tripped him he'd land on his feet. He was strictly business.

"You don't let any grass grow under your feet," I laughed.

"Someone saw you and I figured you'd be staying here so I checked," Manny said. "Why should I let a competitor get to you first?"

But all the while he was talking he made gestures that showed he wanted to talk to me privately. And he looked at the walls and pointed to his ears.

There was a good chance he was right, that we were in a miked room.

"I'll tell you," I said. "I'm going out soon and I have to shower."

"Go ahead. I've done business in dirtier places than a shower stall."

He laughed and I joined in. We went into the bathroom and both of us undressed and got into the shower stall. When I had the water going strong we got our heads close together. We were safe.

"Did they raise your payoff too?" Manny asked. I nodded.

He said, "One more boost and we're through. They're going to squeeze us out."

That didn't make sense. "We lay the golden eggs," I reminded him.

"Not us. Our business. They're getting greedier and greedier. Last week my collector disappeared. With fifty thousand."

"Maybe he skipped." I shook water out of my eyes.

"He was my brother," Manny said. "Three days later he was found. Dead. Accident."

Manny's body was hairy. Plastered with water, he looked more catlike than ever. His back seemed to arch and his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Accident, hell! Someone'd grilled him, tried to make him talk. What could he talk about? My business."

I thought about it. "If we could

see the big man—”

“Don’t be a kid, Waite. Who do you think is behind this? The Director.”

The spray drummed on the back of my head steadily. “So?”

Manny’s mouth hardly moved. “So maybe there’s someone close to him, someone who comes in contact with the Director. Maybe for enough, money... How much can *you* raise?”

“You’re crazy!” I said. My voice was louder than I’d intended and I brought it down. “What about the Council?”

“It’s a one-man show. They’d squabble over who was next in line. In the confusion we might get our own man in.”

“Who? How long could we trust him once he got in?”

Manny spread his hands. “That’s the chance we take. With this bunch we know we’re cooked. They want everything for themselves. You can’t do business with people like that.”

There was a long silence while the water drummed on. I couldn’t quite believe Manny was right about the government waiting to take us over. Secondly, what if we made a try at the Director and failed? We were done. Thirdly, I was still doing all right with the present setup. Take a little, leave a little, the water said. I didn’t trust Manny all the way either.

“I’ll think about it,” I said. “That’s all I can promise you. I’ll think it over.”

“Don’t think too long.” He glared at me. “Shut off that damned water!”

As we stepped out of the stall I said, “All I can promise is you’ll get first crack at my business, Manny.”

THERE WERE a few people I wanted to call, old acquaintances and men in political positions who sometimes were of use to me. The lat-

ter thanked me for the most recent gifts I’d sent and I tried to recall just what the gifts were. I was always sending something; that was part of my overhead.

After the calls there was a fistful of spacegrams to go over. Everything seemed to be going all right. The take, which was in code, ran about normal. But when I figured up the expenses it was like Manny had said, not much leeway left.

Maybe Manny was right. It was a terrific gamble; if we missed we were dead pigeons. But I didn’t mind that. I was used to risks.

The big question was what would happen if we succeeded. Someone would take over the Director’s job. But could we trust the man who took over? I knew the answer to that question. In a little while the squeeze would start again.

It was a lousy picture. There was no one you could trust. You paid and you paid, but you never were sure they’d stay bought.

“Ten o’clock,” Bianch said suddenly. “You got a date.”

I looked at my watch. He was right. I rubbed depilatory powder on my face and slicked my hair down and went next door to get Dara.

When I saw her I stopped dead. I forgot all about everything. She was wearing a soft green dress with a row of honey colored gems that marched up the bodice between her breasts and into her honey hair. They just matched her eyes.

“Do I look all right?” she asked.

I swallowed. “Yeah. You look all right.”

“Sure? You won’t be ashamed to be seen with me?” And she *meant* it. “The dress is—?”

“You’d make any dress look good.”

There was a pause. I hadn’t sounded as offhand as I’d meant to. Then

she slipped her hand into mine.

"Sometimes I think you're pretty nice," she said. She looked up at me rather wistfully. "No more arguments, Waite. Let's have fun tonight."

"I'm already having it," I said. I looked down at her hand. It fit into mine as though it belonged there.

AT THAT hour the Stem was a blaze of lights. Antigrav limousines darted silently and pedestrians had to be nimble. Then, as the limos discharged their bejewelled passengers into the cafes, the people with the ill-fitting clothes and pinched faces gaped hungrily.

"Let's try the Horsehead," I said. "It's as good as any."

We got out under the whirling imitation of the nebula from which the cafe took its name.

There was a rope up, of course, but not for us. The captain said good evening and showed Dara and me to a good table while Bianchi went over to the bar. On the stage a girl and a young man, neither of whom wore anything but some painted stripes, were doing what was billed as a love dance of the zebras.

Dara looked away from the stage but it was no use. No matter where she turned her eyes there was some portion of the female body proudly displayed. I ordered drinks for us and grinned at Dara.

"You'll get used to it," I said. "After a while they could be just a lot of noses, or ears, or toes."

"If it could be, why isn't it?" she said lightly, over the initial shock. "Why the concentration on only certain features?"

"I didn't originate the customs any more than I did the political system," I reminded her.

That seemed to be my last refuge in any argument with her. I changed

the subject. "Let's dance."

The zebra couple were gone and we filtered out onto the floor with about fifty other people. It was a small floor. Since time immemorial dance floors have been too small. I suppose a mass of men and women jammed into a confined space has an aphrodisiac effect. At any rate everyone seemed to be happy.

We danced for a while and it was fun. The floor seemed to enlarge—or maybe I just forgot about the other people on it. When we walked off I took Dara's hand instead of her elbow.

"That was fun," she said as I sat down across from her.

I grinned at her. From a nearby table someone called a hello to me. I waved back.

"Who is he?" Dara asked.

"Name's Grimwalt. Tri Planet Mining. A smart operator."

A very smart man. And a very powerful man. All of Tri Planet's mines were worked by prison labor. I had a hunch that Ishtahi was getting his cut from Grimwalt too.

DARA WAS half turned in her chair, staring at the back of Grimwalt's head. He and his party were leaving. The back of his shaven head looked quite uninteresting to me, although his thick neck indicated a certain amount of animal strength.

"Don't you feel well?" I said. Dara looked pale.

"I'm all right. Not used to such crowded quarters, I guess."

We tipped our glasses to each other. "Where I live it's not so crowded," I said lightly. She gave me a quizzical look and I said, "Intentions honorable."

"Thanks, Waite. But—"

There was a sharp crack outside, accompanied by a shrill whine. A pel-

let gun makes a noise like that. There were screams that penetrated even into the Horeshead. Dara gripped her glass until I thought she'd crush it.

"Take it easy," I said. "Probably some cop after a thief."

Dara nodded and took a stiff swallow of her drink. Bianch, who had stepped outside, drifted in and passed our table. I looked up at him.

"Grimwalt," he said. "Right in the belly."

"I want to leave," Dara said shakily.

I jumped up and helped her out of her chair. We started for the door and I saw there was some commotion outside. I thought I glimpsed a familiar moonface.

"This way." We swung around and cut back behind the bandstand. Beyond a bunch of naked chorus girls there was a door. We went through the door into the alley.

Another door beckoned across the way and we stepped through it into a spot much like the Horsehead, but for the poorer trade. Its patrons, absorbed in their drinks and conversation, paid no heed as we drifted through the place.

"Let's ease back and see what's going on," I suggested. "All right with you, Dara?"

"All right."

YOU COULD feel the excitement even before you turned the corner. Two police floaters drifted high above the Horsehead and their beams bathed the walk and the street around it in brilliant light. Limos still cruised along, their owners fairly certain they wouldn't be halted. But the workers, their peaked faces drawn thinner, were making what haste they could away from that island of light.

I realized suddenly that most of these people lived in a different world than I. Police to me meant a payoff

and protection. To the workers they meant questioning and trouble.

"Let's not get any closer," Dara whispered. "I don't want to see it."

"Sure."

We stopped, letting the crowds eddy around us. Down in the light I saw Ishtahi talking to someone. This didn't seem like a matter for security police and I wondered at his presence. But before I had time to do much theorizing on the subject, there was a diversion.

A tall fellow in a leather cap had been spotted by one of the police. I heard an imperious voice raised. The leather cap began to run.

The crowd split and he came running toward us, his face twisted in terror. He hadn't a chance to get away and he must have known it.

A police car darted above him and a swinging grappling hook hit him and knocked him sprawling. Before he could get up two burly policemen had him collared.

"I didn't do anything," leather cap pleaded.

"Why did you run?"

"I don't know. I didn't do—"

A truncheon caught him square in the mouth and a fountain of blood spurted. As he fell, experienced toes drove into him. Dara twisted away from the sight. She was sick.

"Come on," I said.

We shoved our way back along the street until I saw a cruising cab. I waved and the cab came down and got us.

"Hotel?" Bianch asked.

"Yeah."

But as we rose I looked back. Ishtahi's round face was lifted in our direction.

I knew how leather cap had felt. Ishtahi couldn't have seen the three of us. But a touch of panic gripped me. What if he played a hunch and

had our cab picked up? If he ever got his hands on Dara and learned she was Chuck Barrett's daughter...

"Into that street!" I pointed downward and we shot into another man-made canyon.

"Get another cab," I told Bianch. "Take her out to the ship and tell Gurla to see she gets home. Fast!"

"Right," Bianch said. He shoved the door open.

Dara stared at me, bewildered. "Go on," I said.

She was half way out when she stopped. Then she flung herself around. Her lips were glued to mine, her body pressed so close we seemed like one. It took all my will power to push her away.

"Beat it," I said harshly.

Her reply was strange. "I—I'm sorry, Waite."

Bianch practically dragged her out. Sorry. What was there to be sorry about? Maybe she figured it had been a pretty expensive day for me, without much reward. Maybe the kiss had been by way of payment.

I got sore at myself. She wasn't that kind of girl. I'd run with the other kind so long that I couldn't figure a decent woman.

With the taste of her lips still on mine I began to wonder whether I could figure anything.

"Where to?" the cabbie asked.

I came awake. Where to? Maybe I could go anywhere safely. But the best thing was to play it close. Three hours should make it pretty easily. What could I do for three hours?

"I think I'll walk," I said. "You go get a drink." And I gave him enough to buy a bottle.

GREGOR was lying back in a relaxer when I got back to the hotel. He'd been watching a newscast but switched it off at once. Bianch

came prowling in from the bedroom.

"We thought you got lost," Gregor said mildly.

"I took a long walk; I had lots to think about," I said.

I looked meaningfully at Bianch and he nodded his head. Everything was all right.

"Anything doing?" I asked.

"Nothing much. They've been lots of fires. They finally put one on a 'cast."

"Anything else?"

"Nope. Pretty quiet."

The buzzer went off. I knew it wasn't going to be quiet much longer.

"See who it is," I told Gregor.

He went to the door and opened it and a quartet of police backed him into the room again. This bunch wore no uniforms, but they didn't have to.

"Dial?" the first one asked.

"Yes."

He nodded. "Alekho?" Gregor bowed gravely. "Dinello?" Bianch inclined his head.

"Come with us."

"Why?" I said.

I thought for a second he'd hit me. But he wasn't sure just what kind of trouble I was in. For all he knew it wasn't serious. And I wouldn't be staying in this suite in this hotel unless I had connections. I got a pass on the smack in the teeth.

"Just come with us."

There was nothing to do but go along.

ISHTAHI let us cool our heels for a while before he had us ushered into his presence. I noticed he was not alone. A couple of his bully boys stood at ease behind him, their hands resting over the bulges in their pockets.

"So you've taken up the simpler pleasures, like walking," Ishtahi mur-

mured. He beamed coldly. "Very healthful."

"Don't tell me there's a law against walking," I grinned.

He came around the desk and slapped me across the face. I took it like a little man. What else could I do?

"You are presuming on a certain past familiarity I allowed you," he said. "Don't forget our relative positions again."

When he was back behind the desk he said, "There was a time of approximately forty-five minutes during your stroll this evening when we lost track of you. Account for that time."

"Certainly. Which forty-five minutes?"

I don't think he'd really expected to trap me that easily into admitting I knew I was being tailed. But he'd given it a try anyway.

"After you turned down Pennsylvania Avenue," he said.

I thought it over. "That must have been when I went into a spot for a drink. I used the washroom and went out the back. Then I found a phone in the next block and made a few calls."

"To whom?"

"Couple of people. Manny Morris. Tom Geraghty. Gary Phillips, at the Gay Venusian."

"What were the calls about?"

"Just to see what was doing."

"You saw Morris earlier."

"Yeah. He had a proposition on some equipment. At the time I thought I might get the Deneb deal. But then I got a hunch I wasn't going to get it, so I called Manny and told him to peddle it to someone else."

"Check the calls," Ishtahi said. One of his men went out.

There was a fresh flower on the desk and Ishtahi picked the petals off it. "You were right about the Den-

eb thing," he said idly. "You're not going to get it. And what you *are* going to get you won't like at all."

A shiver ran down my back. "Why?"

"Technically, on Grimwalt's murder."

I didn't have to pretend amazement. "I hardly knew the man! You don't think I—"

"I said, 'technically'. The real reason is because you've made a fool of me. Nobody can do that to me. You knew I'd have given anything to get my hands on Barrett's daughter. Now she's out of reach."

IF SUCH a thing were possible, Ishtahi looked hurt. "I considered you a friend. That will make it twice as tough on you now."

"I admit I made a mistake," I said, my mind working double speed. "I should have told you about her. But after all, she's just a kid. She—"

Ishtahi blew up. First time I'd ever seen him lose his composure. "You fool! You stupid oaf! She had you wound around her finger! All the time you were away from her she was busy calling orders to her father's friends here in town!"

"I don't believe that!"

He took his time walking to me. He let me see it was coming. This time there was blood in my mouth from the force of the blow.

"Who do you think ordered Grimwalt's murder? Why do you suppose all these fires and explosions are breaking out? Three power plants gone in one day! And that's just a sample of what's been happening all over."

His eyes drilled a hole through me. "And I get the blame for it!"

"I'm sorry," I said, and tried to look it.

"Not yet. But you will be. You've put me in a spot where I have no choice but to go get Barrett. And there's only one way to be sure I do it."

"You're going to—?"

"Everything between the mountains and the coast will have to be blasted off the map!"

He let that sink in. I saw the necessity for the action. They had Barrett sealed on the coast. But they didn't know just where he was. And the coastal bog was so big they could chase him from one end to the other the rest of their lives.

On the other hand, there was no way to judge what the effects of such blasting would be. A whole chunk of a continent gone, with who knew what changes in weather and climate. Even the mountains couldn't prevent all the radioactive dust and debris from drifting eastward.

Ishtahi would have his hands full. In fact, things might get so bad they'd have to have a goat. And he was the most likely candidate.

He'd been studying me while I considered all these things. And Ishtahi was a man who could see ahead as well as the next fellow.

"You know," he said, "there might be another way."

I said nothing.

"Unless..." He got up, more friendly like, and patted me on the shoulder. "I've always like you, Waite. You know that. But in spite of my personal feelings toward you, until one second ago your head was due to roll. Now..."

He looked me straight in the eyes. "How'd you like to walk out of here not only alive, but with the whole Deneb area wrapped up?"

TALK ABOUT a switch! "What is this, a new form of mental torture?"

"Oh no. Unless... How do you feel about the Barrett girl now?"

"How do I feel? After she deliberately put my neck on the chopping block? How do you think I feel?"

He slapped the desk. "All right. That's what I wanted to know! Sit down, Waite."

I sat down. The atmosphere had changed suddenly. Even the bully boys had relaxed. The temperature on the face of the moon had risen a hundred degrees.

Ishtahi hunched forward. "You got to Barrett once, Waite. Can you do it again?"

"I suppose so. Unless he gets skittish. But there's no reason to think he will. Getting him out will be the problem. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"I want him and the girl. I may need her to put pressure on him for the information I want."

He stabbed a finger at me. "You'd better not cross me."

"Don't worry. You'd only go back to your original plan. I'd be dead anyway. There's only one way I can come out on this, and that's to bring Barrett and the girl back with me."

"Right. You do that and you get what I promised."

He'd certainly made the offer tempting. But he'd forgotten something he'd told me earlier. "You said you didn't have the say on allocations like that."

"Don't worry. When I turn Barrett over to the Director I'll tell him how it happened."

I lit a cigarette and thought it over. "I've got a better idea. Let me hand him over to the Director personally. Might make a stronger impression."

It was the first time I'd ever heard Ishtahi laugh. Not a real laugh, but a strange chortle, like water gurgling through pipes that had been frozen.

"All right, Waite. I guess you're not

satisfied to touch the hand that has touched the hand. You want to touch it direct."

Then he was all business. "You can have my best men."

"Uh-uh. That would tip him off. Gregor and Bianch will be enough."

"All right. You've got twenty-four hours."

That was it. He opened a box on his desk and took out a long cigarette and lit it. Going out the door I got a whiff of the strong scent that hid the smell of something else Ishtahi used in his cigarettes.

MAYBE I'VE spent longer two-hour periods in my life than that trip to the coast. But I can't remember any. And the last ten minutes, coming down in murky dawn through soupy fog, was equivalent to a normal week.

The locals who greeted us this time were not the same ones I'd seen. Probably the early watch, I thought.

"I want to see Barrett," I said.

"Not around."

I grinned. "I know. You tell him it's Waite Dial."

The local shook his head. "I know who it is. He's still not around."

My heart sank. This was a possibility I hadn't considered. Yet it was logical. Chuck must have known Ishtahi would be after him. And he'd done the sensible thing. He'd moved.

"I've got to talk to him," I pleaded.

"Sorry. I just don't know where he is."

"Then get someone who does. Get word to Barrett that his life depends on this."

If it wasn't the words, it was the tone of voice. Something convinced the man. He said he'd see what could be done and walked away.

We waited. We waited quite a

while. More than an hour. At last the man came back. With him was one of the big fellows I'd seen before.

"If you've got a message for Barrett, I'll deliver it."

I grunted. "Sorry. I'll deliver it myself."

He shook his head. "Can't be done."

"Too bad." I jerked my head at Gregor and Bianch. "Let's go." We started into the ship.

You never know with a bluff. Maybe it'll work and maybe it won't. Unfortunately, in this case I had no real hand to play.

"Wait a second."

I turned around, hoping he wouldn't see the sweat on my face. "Yeah?"

"You'll have to leave the ship here."

My knees felt weak. Had he but known, I'd have left one of my arms there if necessary.

THEY TOOK our guns too. But they missed the knives. It's hard to find something as thin as paper and not much wider than a watchspring. Better men had missed those knives.

We got into an old-fashioned ground vehicle that took us a couple of miles out of town. Then we got out and walked for twenty minutes to the edge of the bog. Muck like glue sucked at our feet.

We stopped when we couldn't go any further. All around us was a strange world of mud and foliage. There was growth everywhere, a tangle that looked impenetrable. Not a path, not a sign of one. And this thing stretched for over a thousand miles.

"All right," our guide said. He stuck his fingers in his mouth and gave a penetrating whistle.

Something that was half boat and

half tractor rumbled out of the gloom. We climbed in and a moment later the growth was all around us.

For a clumsy-looking vehicle it certainly travelled fast. And the driver must have lived in the bog all his life. There was no way to tell for sure, but it seemed to me we covered a couple of hundred miles in the next two hours. Trails appeared and vanished again; we seemed to backtrack time and again.

"There must be a faster way," I grumbled at last.

"There is," our guide said. "But this'll do for now."

Nothing to do but wait. And hope it wouldn't take too long.

Eventually we got there. All of a sudden there was a small island in the bog, a spot of solid ground with a house on it. A pair of small plastic cars were around on the side. The man I'd fought stood near the door talking to another fellow.

Both of them fell in behind us as we went through the door. I could almost feel their guns on my spine.

Chuck had just been talking on an old-fashioned telephone type of communication system. They weren't taking any chances on wireless of any sort. That might be picked up.

I was afraid for a minute that Dara wasn't there. But when she heard Chuck call my name she came running in from the next room. She looked as though she hadn't got much rest since I'd last seen her.

"Waite! Oh, Waite! I've been so worried."

SHE FLEW into my arms and I enveloped her. My hand came around her neck and the blade of the knife was on her jugular. I swung her around, clear off the floor, so her back was to the men behind me.

"Drop those guns, boys," I said.

"She's a dead pigeon if you don't."

They were good men, but they hadn't a chance. They couldn't shoot without hitting Dara. And by the time they could get to me I could have cut her throat from ear to ear. She lay against me, stiff and still, feeling the sharp edge of death on her skin.

"I meant it," I said sharply. "Drop the guns or start shooting, because she dies right now."

They let go of the guns like the metal had turned red hot. Gregor told them to back up and got the guns off the floor. In seconds he and Bianch had the two men and Barrett covered and I could let Dara go.

"Waite," her father said. "What the devil are you up to?"

"Just this. You and Dara are coming out of here with me. To New Washington."

Dara stared at me, unbelieving. "No. You—you wouldn't. You *couldn't* turn us in."

"No? You left me holding the sack, didn't you?"

"Don't blame her," Barrett said, his face gray. "That was my idea. When I discovered Ishtahi was getting warm I had to act fast. There wasn't time to use the usual channels."

"So you used me," I said bitterly. "Knowing Ishtahi would boil me in oil when he found out."

"That was different! The lives of millions of people are at stake."

"Well, *my* life is at stake now."

He did the last thing in the world I'd have expected him to do. He folded his hands across his chest and shook his head.

"No dice, Waite. You can start shooting. I'm not putting myself and Dara in Ishtahi's hands. We'd rather die here."

Luckily, I had an answer for that.

"That's mighty fine talk. Except for one thing. If you die here, so will everyone else on the coast. Either I'm back with you and Dara in a few hours or Ishtahi starts blasting away."

That was it. The one argument he couldn't defeat. It wasn't just his life now, or Dara's. I didn't know what the population of the coast area was, but Chuck wasn't risking it against the lives of two people.

He got up. "All right. You win. Come on, honey."

He took his daughter's arm and we all walked out. I couldn't bring myself to look her in the face.

ISHTAHI himself was at the airport to meet us. In a moment the ship was surrounded by his men. His round smile came down the lane of uniforms to greet us.

"I'm happy you didn't disappoint me, Waite. Happy for both of us."

To Barrett he bowed. "A pleasure indeed. I have many things in store for you and your daughter. Much to discuss. But first we have an appointment. Please come with me."

Barrett knew what was in store for him, and what the discussions would be like. But he didn't turn a hair. He spat at the ground.

"Anything," he said. "Just get me away from this scum here."

"Ah?" Ishtahi raised his eyebrows. "You prefer me to Waite?"

"You never pretended to be my friend."

"Really. You're quite naive, Barrett. I had something far more valuable to offer Waite than your friendship."

I grinned at that. "I'm glad you haven't forgotten."

"You're a fool, Waite. I'd gladly have paid ten times Deneb for this. Come along now."

We went down the lane to Ishtahi's carrier, an armored job that held the six of us and the pilot and four guards very comfortably. Surrounded by police cruisers, we skimmed along just above roof level to the landing deck of the government building.

Never having used this entrance before, I was interested to see that the same precautions were used as below ground. Despite the fact that Ishtahi himself was with us, every one was thoroughly frisked for weapons.

Then we took the elevator, down this time. I felt my heart pounding. We were close to the nerve center of the universe. In just a short while I'd be in a room closed to all but a handful of people.

It was a big elevator, but even so we were somewhat crowded. I was close to Dara, so close my arm touched hers. She shrank away from me with a shudder.

Ishtahi's sharp eyes caught the gesture. "I'm happy to see you're so sensitive, Miss Barrett. Sensitive people are much easier to work with."

Maybe he knew his business, but I'd have guessed otherwise about Chuck and Dara. Both looked ashen, but stiff-lipped and stiff-necked. They were afraid; that was only a human reaction. But neither of them was a coward.

Then the elevator stopped. We were in a long corridor, facing a door as big and massive as the ones on bank vaults.

Apparently we were expected. The massive door swung open. We were in a large room facing another door exactly like the one we had just passed. This room was empty, and yet I had the feeling that wary eyes watched us.

Behind us the door shut and ahead of us the other door opened. Another room. One man behind a

desk. Behind him still another door.

The man at the desk nodded to Ishtahi, ran his eyes over the rest of us. There was a pause. He bent his head to a microphone on the desk and spoke in a low voice. A moment later the last door opened.

POWER HAS an aura. The room was ascetic in its furnishings. It was devoid of pictures, of any distractions. And yet it was more impressive than if it had been lined with gold and studded with precious stones.

I had the same feeling about the man who occupied the room. He wore a plain business suit. He was neither tall nor short. His hair was gray at the temples, his face tanned and square and hard.

Power had become a part of the Director. It radiated from him. Try as I would, I couldn't overcome a feeling of awe.

"You have quite a retinue, Ishtahi." His voice was low, but it carried.

"These are the men who brought in Barrett and his daughter. They begged the honor of this audience."

The Director nodded. "See that they are rewarded properly."

His eyes fastened on Chuck, shutting out the rest of us. "And you are Barrett. I was curious to see you, to see the man who was going to take my job."

"I didn't want your job," Chuck said. "I want it abolished."

"You're a fool. Twice a fool. If your ridiculous rebellion could have succeeded, you'd have found another Director. Government without power is futile. And power corrupts."

"Don't judge everyone by yourself. Some people don't corrupt so easily."

A flash of anger darkened the Director's face. "We'll see how incorruptible you are. I want the names of

your lieutenants. All of them."

"Go to hell," Chuck said.

"Ishtahi!"

Ishtahi jerked his head at the four men who'd come in with us. Two of them leaped at Chuck, pinning his arms behind him. The other two stepped forward. Chuck braced himself for the blows.

But they didn't hit him. They hit Dara. One of them ripped her dress and her undergarments, stripping her to the waist. The other smashed his fist into her stomach. She fell, retching and gagging, moaning.

Chuck screamed. His eyes were wild as he fought to tear himself free. But he had no chance. The room grew quieter as one of Ishtahi's men dragged Dara to her feet, her breath coming in dry sobs.

"Does betrayal of your friends seem easier now?" the Director asked. "A little corruption setting in?"

Barrett licked his lips. He looked at Dara. Half unconscious as she was, she shook her head.

"You can still go to hell," Barrett said.

They were going to hit her again when the buzzer sounded. The Director held up his hand. He took a few steps back to his desk. "Yes?"

"A member of the Council, sir. Macneil. He says it is very urgent. Very."

"All right."

The door swung open and a tall, loose-lipped man came in. This one had never had the great power. He needed physical evidence to remind him of his position. The jewelled ring on his middle finger alone would have bought an empire.

"What is it, Macneil?" the Director asked impatiently.

Macneil came up to the desk. His voice was higher perhaps than he intended. Higher, and strained.

"There have been more explosions."

The Director grunted. "We'll soon have that taken care of. Is that all that was bothering you?"

"No. One thing more."

"What?"

"You are no longer Director."

The gun in Macneil's hand made no sound. But the waves it threw literally blew the insides out of the man he faced.

ISHTAHI moved like lightning, but I got my foot out in time. He tripped, falling toward Barrett. Chuck's foot shot out and caught him square in the face. One down.

Bianch was a shadow, flicking across space. The knife did not even linger on its way to a second victim. Gregor got the third guard.

The fourth man was the tough one. He had Dara in front of him and he was hauling on his gun. If that thing went off we were cooked. And it was going off in a second.

He never got that second. Dara threw herself backwards, knocking him off balance. In the instant before he could recover Bianch was on him.

"Ah!" Bianch said. He left the knife in the guard and came up with the gun.

Dara was sick from the sight of all the blood. But there was no time to comfort her. Her father could do that. While Gregor made sure Ish-tahi was out for a while.

Now that the flurry of violence was over, Macneil looked sick and uncertain. I got over to him in a hurry before he made a slip that might undo our work.

"Where's Manny Morris?" I asked. He told me that Manny was in the building. In Macneil's office, in fact.

"Good. Have you got your man to take over Ishtahi's job?"

"Yes. One of the department hacks. He'll do as he's told."

So far so good. We didn't have a lot of time, but if we used what we had properly we'd get away with this.

I asked Macneil to get the man in the outer office into the Director's office. That didn't take much doing. Once we had the secretary secure, I told Macneil to get an outside wire cleared.

I turned to Barrett. "Chuck, get hold of some of your people and tell them to raise all the hell they can. But fast."

Chuck made a half dozen calls. He and his underground were better prepared than I'd given them credit for. When his last call had gone through, Macneil checked with Security and found that disturbances had already broken out in scattered sections. He told Security to put all available manpower on it.

Now we had drained as much police power away from the government building as we could. And we were ready for our next move.

We got Manny Morris and Macneil's man up there. Macneil went on all visiphones with a statement that there had been a plot against the Director. Security was ordered to arrest all other members of the Council and to hold them in separate and solitary confinement.

MACNEIL was in and there was no one left to oppose him. As Manny had predicted, the fact that power had resided in such a few men had worked to our advantage. There could be no popular resistance to the coup.

"Whew," I sighed. "Until Macneil showed up I was afraid the whole deal had soured."

"I worked as fast as I could,"

Manny told me. "The minute your pilot called me and said you were on your way here, I got hold of Macneil and told him we were set to go. The Director's job was his. Then I scooted over here. It only took a couple of minutes altogether. To you it probably seemed longer."

"Years," I grinned.

"Please," Barrett cut in. "I still don't get it. When did all this get itself arranged?"

"Before I went back to snatch you and Dara," I said. "I couldn't let you in on it. One of you would have given the thing away for sure. As it was, you hated my guts so much it stuck out all over you and Dara. Ishtahi knew you weren't acting. If he'd had any suspicion the facts were otherwise, we were done for."

Chuck had seemed happy. Now his face fell. "Not that it makes any great difference. Dara and I are alive, of course. But actually things remain unchanged. You've merely replaced one Director with another of your own choosing."

Macneil had something to say about that. "Nevertheless, I won't forget your assistance. As long as you refrain from further political activity, you and your daughter are safe."

"You shut up," I said.

He glowered at me and Bianch shoved a gun in his ribs and took away the wave gun he'd killed the Director with. Macneil was anything but a strong man. I thought he was going to faint.

Manny hit the roof. "What is this, a double-cross? You're trying to take it over yourself!"

"Nobody's taking it over," I told him. "Macneil here can be figure-head until an election is held. Or whatever way Barrett and his people want it."

"You're crazy!" Manny yelled.

"No, I'm not. I'm just tired of buy-

ing people who won't stay bought. And always fearing that if I got too big someone like Ishtahi would chop off my head.

"And don't forget," I added, "you can't buy back your brother's life."

"That's just it. So what should I do? Just close up shop?" He shook his finger in my face. "What's happened to you anyway?"

"I'm just sick of bribes and pay-offs and people like Ishtahi with their hands held out for more."

"So be a sucker. Go legitimate. But not me. Not Manny."

"You've got one minute to change your mind."

HE KNEW I meant it, but I also knew Manny wouldn't scare. Ordinarily he might not lie. In this situation he almost certainly would.

"Or I've got a better idea," I said. "You've got manufacturing facilities. I've been out in space a long time. The time is ripe. Someone who knew space families and the kind of stuff they want and need could make an awful lot of dough. Could be you and me."

Manny's shrewd eyes studied me. He knew I wasn't kidding. I could almost hear the wheels going around in his head.

"You know," he muttered, "you might have something. At least now you're talking business. Let's go into it further."

"A deal," I said. "But not right now. I've got other business."

With one hand Dara was holding together the torn dress. I took her free hand. "If someone will open that door again I'd appreciate it."

Macneil obliged by pushing the button which controlled the huge mechanism. Some day that door and all the others like it in this building were going to open and stay open.

Dara and I were in the room alone.

We stood silently for a moment, looking at each other. Her eyes dropped.

"I'm sorry, Waite," she said, "for the things I thought about you. And for what I did earlier. I literally put your neck in the noose."

"All is forgiven," I grinned. "But I am going to get even. I'm going to put your finger in a ring."

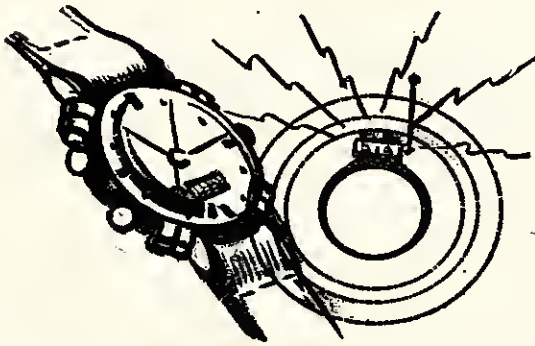
"I think it's wonderful. If I didn't have to hold this darned dress together, I'd have both my arms around you."

I was space-happy, feeling a grin all over my face. "That's all right. I've got two free hands."

She swung between them and I gathered her close.

THE END

DICK TRACY IS A PIKER!



By June Lurie

OF ALL the marvelous inventions that have appeared in the comic strips none has made a more impressive impact on American gadget-consciousness than the famous "wrist-watch radio" worn by Dick Tracy, master detective of the newspaper continuity. What person hasn't wished for one of those ingenious transceivers which, strapped to the wrist, put you in touch with any place in the country?

Under the tremendous progressive program in electronics that exists today, this comic-strip conception of the wrist-watch radio may be a lot less fanciful than we realize. In fact, if anything, the fictitious detective's radio is an amateurish job, considering the latest developments in the cands.

The reduction to miniature of radio and electronic parts has gone on apace. Nowadays you can cram transmitters and receivers into match boxes. Vacuum tubes are built half the size of a thimble. Still these advances have not been adequate. It remained for the transistor to supply the final touch to the art of functional compression.

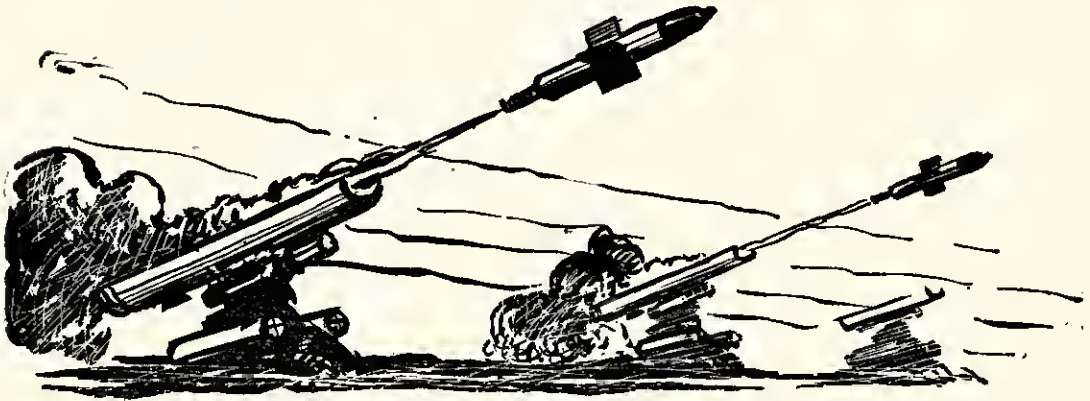
The transistor is that incredible mixture of simplicity and complexity, a sliver of germanium metal touched by three wires. No larger than a pea, it is yet a perfect vacuum tube. The newest transistor is the one that will bring about the wrist-watch radio, if anything does. Called a "junction or compound" transistor, it has the ability to amplify or magnify electrical signals a million times! And it will do this on less than a millionth of a watt of power! These figures mean hardly anything unless you compare them with those of ordinary radio tubes—the miniature variety—where the amplification factor is of the order of thousands and the power requirements are measured close to a watt.

Already the transistor is going into every kind of apparatus that employs vacuum tubes, replacing them and occupying a minute fraction of the space, while consuming an equally small fraction of the power. Those concerned with the design of jets and rockets which require countless electronic gadgets are delighted, since every pound that disappears in weight from their requirements enables them to build their ships that much better. Now a radar device will fit in a shoe box, whereas formerly it occupied a huge carton's worth of space.

The stage is set; everything is ready for some astounding advances in electronic science, advances which will dwarf even the miracle of color television—and right in there, doing most of the work, will be the ubiquitous transistor, a few pennies' worth of magic!

KILLER BIRDS

By Frederic Booth



"LONG-WARNING radar's caught a bird coming in at these coordinates. It's only one, so it must be atomic. We'll put five surface-to-air's up against it—a couple of seekers and the rest commanders. Hop to it, boy—we've got to knock this one down—away from Denver!"

That paragraph isn't unintelligible gibberish, though it has all the earmarks. Rather, it's a hypothetical conversation offered by a "guided missiles" officer on the long-range interception of an enemy atomic war-headed rocket, using "birds", the g-m people's favorite word.

Essentially, all guided missiles are variations of the rocket-jet principle and had their practical inception in the closing days of World War II, when the Germans used them in a rudimentary fashion. Since then the progress has been enormous.

Of course, the long-promised "push button" warfare is not yet a thing of reality. The infantryman is still in the picture, but that picture is changing so rapidly, and so much progress is being made in guided missile work, that the day of push-button warfare will certainly come. The development of powerful rocket and jet motors has eliminated the powering of missiles as a problem. Extreme advancement in electronics and control has all but eliminated the guidance of guided missiles. Now it is merely a matter of refinement.

Guided missiles have been grouped in a variety of nice classifications which are not likely to change much with the years. Their names, "air-to-air, surface-to-air, air-to-surface, and surface-to-surface", are self-explanatory. Each type has a definite

purpose, serving either for the defensive shooting down of enemy "birds" or for offensive action (our own "birds").

Guided missiles are further classified into types signifying their method of control. A g-m may ride a radar beam right to the target. It may ride an optical beam to the target (i. e., controlled directly by observation and remote radio apparatus). It may use its own eyes—built-in television. It may seek out heat or noise with acute tactile or auditory senses. Or it may be pre-set on a course adjusted and modified by an interval navigator a computer using actual shots of the stars.

All of these control methods are successful: the situation determines which is to be used. In radio and radar guiding the possibility of enemy jamming and interference must be considered—consequently, for the interception of enemy planes and rockets, the preference is given to guidance methods safe from interference.

Realization of the importance of guided missiles stems from the earliest experience with them. When London was bombarded with thousands of V-2 rockets, most of which hit the city, not one, not a single one, was intercepted or shot down—in fact, not one was seen until it hit! No man-controlled machine could hope to intercept a guided missile. The problem must be turned over to other guided missiles, which stand a good chance of nailing the interloper. It is machine against machine, truly robotic warfare. And in a sense it isn't warfare of the future, but rather of the present, for guided missiles are here with us now!



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

AS MOST of you know, the Tenth World Science-Fiction Convention is to be held at the Morrison Hotel in Chicago over Labor Day week end, August 30 to September 1. This will probably be the biggest convention ever held by fandom. At this writing the program is taking shape—and, as you will see, it is really something!

Guest of honor at the convention will be Mr. Hugo Gernsback, pioneer in science-fiction, the first man to edit and publish a magazine dedicated entirely to science-fiction. Under his guidance the old *AMAZING STORIES* appeared in April, 1926—formally launching a literature which has been going strong ever since.

Featured among the speakers will be Mr. John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*. In discussing the topic of his talk, Mr. Campbell said: "Why, after lying fallow for some 2000 years, has science-fiction suddenly blossomed? What cultural force has brought into prominence a form of literature that remained almost unnoticed for those many centuries?" In attempting to answer this question, Mr. Campbell will speak on "The Place of Science-Fiction in the Modern Cultural Pattern".

Speaking on the science non-fiction portion of the program will be Dr. Joseph A. Winter, whose talk will deal with thinking machines and the human brain. George O. Smith is to discuss possibilities for constructing an energy weapon—the familiar

"blaster" of s-f. In addition, they are planning a scientific panel, details of which will be released in the next bulletin.

In a lighter vein, they will present short illustrated talks by "Probability Zero" experts, Dr. John H. Pomeroy, Irvin Heyne and Les Cole, speaking on "How to be an Expert Without Actually Knowing Anything", "The Fourth Dimensional Aspects of Time Travel", and "Lunar Geology of the Little Men's Mining District".

Featured in the entertainment will be Ted Sturgeon, singing ten new science-fiction songs and ballads and accompanying himself on "The Monster", a 12-string guitar which he describes as "the most authoritative stringed instrument since the invention of the clavichord".

We have been promised a skit by Bill Venable, Bob Krepps and the rest of the Pittsburgh group.

With this kind of line-up you can't afford to miss the convention! And you'll no doubt see Howard Browne, Lila Shaffer, Mari and me there.

* * *

I might title this editorial the "Importance of the Insignificant", if it were important enough to give a title. If it were a sermon my text would be the ditty, "For want of a nail the shoe was lost/ For want of a shoe the horse was lost, etc."

You see, at the moment I'm flat on my back, writing with a pencil,

because of a slipped disc in my spine, which does nothing more startling than press on a tiny nerve if I sit up or stand. Then that nerve sends a message of intense pain to my mind. In ten days or so it will go back to normal. It's happened before. If it happens too much more I'll have to have an operation called spinal fusion in which the weak joint is welded into a solid mass by bone grafts.

But as I lie here, impatient with a tiny nerve that prevents me from functioning normally, I begin to think how most very important things are insignificant in themselves.

Quite often the successful man is one who sensed the importance of something too insignificant for others to notice. Quite often a fatal failure may be chalked up to overlooking something obvious because it was insignificant.

Current study of polio seems to indicate that all previous research overlooked or ignored the fact that some people don't get it, and those people hold the clue to the prevention of this dread disease.

It may be that the eventual cure for cancer will be found by study of the people who don't have it.

In medical research, more and more, scientists are searching for the insignificant. Only they, in their specific researches, are aware of the full truth of that statement. Even they don't know which insignificant detail they are familiar with holds the element that would bring success to their years of research.

In the fictional detective field Sherlock Holmes was the master at converting the gravy stain, the speck of dust, the lone hair on the rug, and the piece of ticker tape into an identification of the murderer, complete with name and location, a fortnight hence at seven minutes after six.

In the college text on physics you can see even more amazing feats in the cloud chamber, the spectroscope, and a host of other gadgets.

The feats of deduction in science often make Sherlock look like a piker. But the new techniques using radioactive isotopes will soon outshine even these. By means of these tracer elements the progress and behavior of the individual atom in a complex process can be followed exactly.

Ten years ago it would not have been considered important to trace the history of an iron atom from the soil into a spinach plant, and then into a human. Today it is. And today such things can be done.

The value of the insignificant is shown best in its influence on theory. The classic example of that is the orbit of Mercury which Newtonian laws of gravity couldn't explain, which had to wait three hundred years for Einstein to come along. There are similar examples in every field of science—insignificant things that play no vital role except to serve as reminders that the current theories to which they are the isolated exceptions are not final theories at all.

And, though all these thousands of things of science make Sherlock Holmes look like a piker, I often wonder what a real man of his caliber would do in the realms of science.

So little of the progress in science comes about by bold, broad strokes of inference! And so few of those turn out to be final in any sense of the word!

It is only in fiction that the bold, broad strokes of inference find their forte today. In fiction the new social perception finds its life, the almost discarded integrity of a past generation finds its immortality. And the hope or despair of a future generation finds its realization.

The fiction, the pulp magazine or the two-bit novel or the book, are insignificant alongside the auto, the video, the atom bomb. But the fiction has forerun the reality and shaped it, and in turn has been shaped by that reality.

And if the past is any criterion of the future, all that will be left of our current civilization will be its books of fiction. And we will be judged and evaluated by them—as were the Greeks and Romans.

* * *

Almost certainly none of the current fanzines (in spite of the hopes of their editors) will survive to that late date. Their function is not to pass on to posterity the precious heritage of our way of life (they can leave that task to Howard Browne and Rog Phillips), but to provide a vehicle for expressing that heritage to those who will appreciate it most—you readers who are alive right now.

So without more ado about nothing (as I used to say when I wrote under my Bill Shakespeare by-line), I'd better dive (ouch! my disjointed back!) into reviewing them, with the aid of my wife and most helpful partner, Mari Wolf, the only member of this family able to sit up and type at the moment.

Our task is much lightened by the mysterious Mr. U of the fanzine *Beginning the Future*, who now confesses to being Ronald S. Friedman! He wrote his own review, so it takes place of honor.

* * *

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION: 10c a copy, 12 for \$1.00, 52 for \$4.00; Ronald S. Friedman—Editor and Publisher, Intergalactic Publications, Box 1329—Grand Central Station, New York 17, N.Y. This is a

weekly "newszine", and the current issue has 16 pages which tell of the latest doings in the world of "fan stf".

Among an immense staff of world-wide correspondents are such acti-fen as Franklin M. Dietz, Hal Hostetler, Ed Noble, Stan Woolston, Fred Goetz, Henry Moskowitz, Lou Sherman, Ron D. Rentz, Roger N. Dard, G. M. Carr, and Jim Schreiber. Among "outsiders" contributing to this issue were Bob Tucker, Jim Schreiber, J. M. Fillinger, James V. Taurasi, Allen Newton, Tom Covington, A. Charles Catania, Bob Farnham, Roger Nelson, Don Ford, and Don Day.

At present, CSF has 628 subscribers, and the current issue was sent to 1100 fans, including 234 residing outside of the territorial limits of the United States.

Of particular interest were Roger N. Dard's column, "Presenting Australia", and Jim Schreiber's bit on Flying Disks and the *Extra-Terrestrial Research Organization*. CSF also played up a scoop regarding the preparations Bob Tucker is making in order to fold shop on his now famous *Newsletter*.

A prozine-fanzine-book review, news on forthcoming conventions (five of 'em), ten National and International fan clubs, and twelve stateside local groups may also be found. The zine, due to the amount of work that goes into it, is naturally non-profit; but who cares? The editor gets a kick out of producing it, and you'll get even more of a thrill by reading it. After all, a couple of dollars more or less in the red each month is but a small price to pay for the enjoyment the staff derive from their foremost hobby; science-fiction!

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd. Ave., Flushing 54, New York. A newszine, brought out twice a month, that covers all the major editors and book publishers by personal contact, so that it can bring you the news before it happens. Taurasi also has correspondents who keep him supplied with news of interest to fans, so that the entire science-fiction field finds excellent coverage.

Fantasy-Times can answer a lot of your questions. Do you know what radio or TV shows are of special interest to fans? Do you know what stf movies Hollywood is making or planning to make? What stf books are coming out? *Fantasy-Times* will tell you.

F-T's photo-offset process even gives you a good reproduction—in black and white, of course—of the covers coming up on your favorite prozines.

* * *

SCIENCE-FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; bimonthly; published at 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. A photo-

offset magazine, formerly called *Fantasy Advertiser*.

Although this zine is largely devoted to advertisements, it always contains top articles on science fiction that are of interest to both the stf fan and the general reader.

In the issue for review here Arthur J. Cox has written the first of two installments on a study of A. E. Van Vogt. This study is extremely comprehensive, much more so than the usual review of a writer's works. Cox analyzes Van Vogt's writing technique, style, and presentation of ideas, and in the concluding installment will have an investigation into Van Vogt's character as a person.

Then, of course, there are the ads. Here you'll find just about everything for sale—rare stf books, back issues of magazines, artwork. And if you have any stf or fantasy material for sale, you'd do well to list it here.

* * *

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN:

The official organ of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, the largest and one of the most active of all fan organizations. The NFFF is "an association of persons interested in promoting the progress of science fiction and fantasy and in furthering its enjoyment by themselves and others".

NFFF members are in all parts of the country, as well as overseas. There are active members in Great Britain and Australia, making it actually an international organization.

If you're interested in corresponding with other fans and taking an active part in fan activities, as well as keeping up on all the latest fan news, why don't you join the NFFF? Membership is \$1.00 a year, which includes subscription to the National Fantasy Fan as well as other benefits. For further information, write to the secretary, G. M. Carr, 5319 Ballard Ave., Seattle 7, Washington.

* * *

VIEWS IN S F: 10c; Monthly bulletin of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum. Send your dime to Circulation Manager Menasha Brodie, 3315 Pinkney Road, Baltimore 15, Maryland.

There's an article in this issue by Fishel Pearlmutter on "The Effect of the Atomic Bomb on Science Fiction". Eye-catching title, isn't it? Pearlmutter's conclusions are that the bomb didn't change s-f writing much, but that it did increase publication of s-f in fields such as the slick magazines and big book publishers. Maybe because the bomb turned a lot of what people scoffed at as "impossible" into "not-even-improbable".

You're invited to join the BSFF whether you're a resident of Baltimore or not. And if you are in Baltimore, why not drop in

at one of the meetings? Write to Menasha Brodie for further details.

* * *

SOL: 10c; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Road, Ridgewood, N. J. Bob Silverberg has a column in this issue on Reviewing the Reviewers. Since one of the Reviewers he reviews is the Club House, I'm now in the process of reviewing Reviewing the Reviewers... Huh? Or is this getting a bit confusin'?

Thelma Kelley writes "On Time", a theory that when you're having fun and time seems to be going quickly, it actually is! The seconds are feeling lazy, and therefore making themselves shorter. On the other hand, when you're watching the time clock and the hours seem to be dragging by, they really are. Long, slow-moving seconds. But people just don't realize these things.

Sol is put out by the Drill Press Publications, and is published on We, the Machine—a mimeograph.

* * *

OOPSLA: 10c; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Nine issues a year. A well-balanced zine, with articles, columns, and a lot of humorous fan fiction.

Shelby Vick's "Dear Alice" seems to be a regular feature. Unique, too. A series of fan stories all with the same title—"Dear Alice." This one is about a creature named Yngvi who is very unhappy because everyone says he is a louse. Of course he is, by species....

And Redd Boggs has a somewhat satiric article on the way a 1930 fan would have reacted to accurate predictions of the future of stf and the world generally. Stop to think of it, it has been an improbable twenty years.

But the real bouquets for this zine should go to its editor for a high sense of humor and editorial ability.

* * *

OPUS 3: W. Max Keasler, Box 24, Washington U., St. Louis 5, Mo. No price listed anywhere.

The front cover of this issue is given over to cartoons. One of the best of these has one fan saying to another "I really love to read his stuff, but he's so common one just has to pan him." The would-be-highbrow in a nutshell...

Lee Hoffman manages to work about half of fandom, as well as a good sprinkling of pro-dom, into her one-page who-done-it-and-why, "The Case of the Conventioneering Corpse". Names dropped all over the place. Bodies too.

But, Max, why don't you let your readers know how much cash they're supposed to send you?

* * *

THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: Sample copy on request. Published by the Chicago Rocket Society. Edited by Robert Friberg, 424 N. Grant St., Hinsdale, Ill. The Chicago Rocket Society meets regularly the first Friday of each month at eight P. M., in Room 518, Roosevelt College, 440 S. Michigan Blvd. Visitors welcome.

The CRS is devoted primarily to the technical study of rockets, space flight, and conditions to be met on other planets. This issue contains a comprehensive survey on "The Cost of Interplanetary Cargo Transportation".

A very valuable regular feature is "Rocket Abstracts", brief quotes from current technical publications.

Active membership in the CRS is \$5.00 a year, associate is \$3.00. Robert Friberg can give you further information.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTER: 15c; Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 702, Bloomington, Ill. Know what new magazines are coming out? What stf writers will soon be having their works on TV? The *News Letter* will tell you.

Besides the straight-news round-up of pro and fan activities, you'll find comprehensive review sections covering both books and individual stories. Just about everything in the stf field is reviewed here, in Darrell C. Richardson's regular column or in the news sections.

Do you find it hard to keep up on fantasy news? If you do, send for the *News Letter*.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST: Edited by Capt. K. F. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 15, c/o G.P.O. England.

Operation Fantast sells by subscription only. The U.S.A. rate is 75c for four issues. "Subscriptions include membership of O.F. and enable members to receive all Newsletters, etc, issued in the subscription period." And this British zine is well worth it, too.

One of the features O.F. offers its members is a chance to get in on its swap trading. You can also make a lot of fan friends all over the world. Write Ken Slater and find out all about it.

* * *

SOLAR SCIENCE STORIES: 10c; W. Freiberg, 5018 W. 18th. St., Cicero 50, Ill. This zine is also known as *SF Cometeer*, combined with *Renaissance*, which can be obtained at the above address or from J. Semenovitch, 40-14 10th. St., Long Island City 1, New York.

You'll find fiction, features and review columns in this expertly hectographed zine. One of the best in this issue is Redd

Boggs' article on how to get an idea for that overdue article you've promised a fanzine. Humorous, as well as supplying Boggs with his article.

* * *

CONFUSION: 5c; Shelby Vick, Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida. As Shelby says in this issue of the Novelty Fanzine, "Any resemblance between confusion and *Confusion* is purely confusing..."

There's a semi-regular feature called Tracings. It consists of part of a picture traced from a current prozine. Each time Tracings appears, a different part of the picture is given. The idea is for the reader to identify the original source and win a prize—a subscription to *Confusion*.

* * *

RHODOMAGNETIC DICEST: 25c; Don Fabun, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley 4, California. A real masterwork of fanpublishing, multilithed, some pages in two color. This zine is getting more and more interesting. After concentrating for many issues on the theme that nine tenths of the current prozines stink because they don't appeal to people of the caliber of a Ph.D. in English, this time they let in under editorial protest a defense of Bill Hamling's *IMACINATION* written by Gregg Calkins, who, though he lacks an understanding of the "absurdity assertion" as a form of biting satire, is at least honest in his attitude. And—surprise!—so are some of the reviews of the prozines this time.

If they could forget to review the prozines (and few fanzines do review them) it would improve their zine, because it is otherwise filled with many pages of the best writing in fandom.

There's an editorial by Don Fabun. He quotes Bob Silverberg and Gregg Calkins, who defend the mimeographed fanzine against the quality job like *Rhodomagnetic Digest*. He uses intellectual diatribe against them to establish his superior intellectual position, such as doubting if they can spell *magazine* since they use *mag*. And I think it's a shame. *Rhodo* could be the best in the field in content as well as format if it rejoined fandom instead of attempting to set up a super-exclusive fandom devoted to expelling most prozines and fanzines and fans and editors and authors to the Never Never Land beneath the turned-up nose.

* * *

Which winds up the reviews for this time, and leaves me wondering if *Rhodo* can take it as well as dish it out....

—ROG PHILLIPS

SAM MERWIN'S



SCIENCE FICTION

BOOKCASE

VARIOUS types of science-fantasy anthologies continue to flow from the publishers' presses like the—well, if not exactly like the flow of Niagara Falls, certainly with a steady inexorable flow like that of the river Mississippi.

Should this continuous outpouring of one highly specialized type of volume puzzle some of you, the answer, according to what information we have been able to scrape up, lies in assured lending-library sales. Plus the fact that such collections represent a rather small outlay in authors' royalties, and permit a higher price than that commercially acceptable for a single novel or a gathering under one covering of a lone author's shorter efforts.

On the plus side, with the appearance of increased numbers of stf anthologies on the shelves of lending libraries throughout the country, we can count on a steady if unspectacular broadening of the field of science-fiction readers. Which means benefits for all publishers, editors, authors and illustrators engaged in this highly-specialized backwater of current literature.

On the minus side, however, this spate of anthologies has two grave drawbacks. First, the number of *good* short stories and novelettes produced in the entire course of modern stf writing is not great. In general, short

novels and the longer jobs have produced a higher level of imaginative writing. Result, anthology after anthology turns up with the same titles by the same authors. We have a hunch that if Ray Bradbury, for instance, cannot quite paper his living room with anthology royalty checks for his *Million Year Picnic*, he could certainly give his broom closet a unique decor.

Second, since more good stories are undoubtedly being produced now than formerly, thanks to better rates of payment and increased respectability of the field—both of which are factors in drawing better authors into the field—readers of stf are apt to find in new anthologies tales they read in one or another of the magazines but a few issues earlier. But as long as publishers can make profits out of anthologies, neither of the above faults is going to be easy to remedy.

* * *

GALAXY READER OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by H.L. Gold, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York (\$3.50).

Mr. Gold introduced pleasantly what may well be the supreme example of the new-story anthology in this fat volume. Since the magazine he founded and edits is less than two years old and since all stories in the

volume are selected from it, none of them, not even *Judas Ram* by one S. Merwin, can truly be said to have stood the test of any but an Einsteinian time.

The volume is divided into eight sections, ranging in title from the alpha of *It Happened Tomorrow* to the omega of *About Time*. In short, these artificial barriers don't mean very much, but the stories that pack them are generally of a high order for those who have not already perused them in paper covers, or who feel moved to read them again altogether under one roof.

Our especial pets include Damon Knight's *Cabin Boy*, a story of aliens with built-in humor, William Tenn's *Venus Is a Man's World*, a charming bit of upended matriarchy, Ted Sturgeon's *The Stars Are the Styx*, an indefinable, and Mack Reynolds' and Fredric Brown's *Dark Interlude*, which scores on the ramparts in Rugby as a "try" on the ramparts of race prejudice. But the chances are you'll have your own favorites.

* * *

THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY, edited by John W. Campbell Jr., Simon and Schuster, New York (\$3.95).

Mr. Campbell's problems in selecting stories for an anthology are more complex than are those of Mr. Gold. His magazine has for more than six years been a sort of Homestead lode for selectors and, in order to avoid falling into the trap of Drawback One (the much-used tale), he too has to some extent fallen into the snare of Drawback Two.

No fewer than thirteen of the twenty-three yarns included date from 1947 or later, and even these include such anthological stand-bys as Tenn's

Child's Play, Sturgeon's *Thunder and Roses* and Clifford D. Simak's *Eternity Lost*. Earlier stuff Currier and Iveses are Robert Heinlein's justly famed *Blowups Happen* (unrevised version), Isaac Asimov's *Nightfall*, Lewis Padgett's riotous *When the Bough Breaks* and Murray Leinster's oft-broadcast *First Contact*.

It is, naturally, a terrific book, despite all the above carping. We went overboard for two novelettes, T. L. Sherred's *E for Effort*, a stirring triumph despite its author's bleeding social consciousness, and James H. Schmitz' delightful space-whimsy, *The Witches of Karres*. We had read both before, but found them still enjoyable. All in all, a book that should have appeared long since, perhaps before other anthologists had dredged so deeply into the ASF pocket.

* * *

INVADERS OF EARTH, edited by Groff Conklin, Vanguard Press Inc., New York (\$2.95).

One of the tow men who started the whole anthological river here comes up with his umpteenth collection. To avoid the pitfalls of the general he has moved along a specified line, as revealed by his title.

The aliens are with us, boys and girls, in various shapes and forms and states of existence, coming in three divisions. One, The Immediate Past; two, The Immediate Future; and three, The Distant Future, which Tony Boucher brings up by himself as a sort of caboose with long-distant (ahead in time) archaeologists making mincemeat of Tellurian history via the shards and scraps they unearth on good old Terra.

As so often occurs when a collector of stories limits himself as to category, the level of tales in this one is a smidgeon or three below the level of

the Gold and Campbell jobs—but not very much. Bill Temple's *A Date to Remember*, Allen K. Lang's *An Eel by the Tail* (a story we rejected as too wacky in our own editorial days, alas), Fred Brown's *The Waveries* and Tenn's *Will You Walk a Little Faster?* hit us right between the eyes. But the general level is of a very high order indeed.

* * *

NIGHT'S YAWNING PEAL, selected by August Derleth, Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York (\$3.00).

Mr. Conklin's sole major predecessor in the sf anthology field has here come up with a tasty selection of his special preferences—which are not, of course, science fiction at all but deal with devils, ha'nts, enchantments, reincarnations and ghouls.

If you are a fancier of the studiously induced goose-pimple this volume is not only your dish—it's your entire meal. Such standouts in horror as Stephen Grendon, Lord Dunsany, Carl Jacobi, Manly Wade Wellman, J. Sheridan LeFanu, Michael West, Robert

Bloch, John Beynon Harris and Algernon Blackwood occupy the first half of the book, with highly literate tidbits torn from the living flesh.

The entire final portion of the tome is taken up, however, with the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft's rare and exceedingly bizarre novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, an interesting and sporadically brilliant study of what happens to a well-born young native son of Providence, Rhode Island, who becomes obsessed with an ancestor who got booted out of Salem (and a good thing too) during the witchcraft panic of the late seventeenth century.

When the book deals with pseudo-history and the very unpseudo-background of old Providence, it comes very close to being first-rate fiction. Unfortunately, when the author brings spells and moanings and incantations and evocations into collision with the more workaday present and past, he all too frequently slips over the rim of the pathetic. But such slips do not occur often enough to seriously damage a fine bit of literary witchery, well worth reprinting.

THE END

THE HAMS CALLED IT "FEEDBACK"

THERE WAS once a word known only to the select coterie of those amateur radiomen known as hams—*feedback*. This word referred to the highly technical fact that vacuum-tube amplifiers could be made stable by feeding back part of the signal put out by them. Hams also used the word *feedback* in connection with vacuum-tube oscillators. Here the *feedback* was arranged so as to aid rather than oppose the input signal. The result was that instability took over and the gadget did what an amplifier should not do—it oscillated.

Today *feedback* is a familiar term. It has to be since it describes not only the phenomenon known to hams in their electronic work, but the operation of almost

any automatic machine above the stage of a simple motor. Feedback has been given a much more general definition and, consequently, it covers many things which were not formerly thought of in technical terms. Such a simple thing as steering a boat involves *feedback*. By the feel of the water against the rudder, you judge how much force must be applied, and in what direction. In a phrase, the principle of *feedback* is the method of modifying a present action by an anticipated future action. When the thing is done by automatic machinery, you have "robotics". Oil burners, voltage regulators in automobiles, thermostats—a thousand devices which are essentially robotic use the principle of *feedback*. —Jack Winter

THE READER'S FORUM



Dear Ed:

I have just finished the June ish (having bought it yesterday) and of course I shall state my opinions of it:

1. The illos were all good, the best one being Ed Emsler's for "The Opposite Is Hell".

2. The stories—first "Secret of the Black Planet", second "They Fly So High", and third all the rest of the stories.

3. A word on "Master of the Universe". As far as I'm concerned, this history (?) of the future has got to go. The idea is so old that no other mag has ever thought of doing it and when my favorite, AMAZING, starts a series like that I'm about ready to give up...but I won't. I'll just ignore "Master of the Universe" and read the rest of the mag.

4. In regard to a Mr. Pickersgill's letter, I say—no serials! I've seen the GALAXY and ASF serials, and they're all right—for the readers of those mags! I don't like them and never will.

Now that I've dwelled on AMAZING, may I speak of the new addition, FANTASTIC? This mag has a great format and the cover paintings were sensational. I only have one beef—there should be more stf and less fantasy. The best story was "Someday They'll Give Us Guns". Following that, in order, were "Full Circle", "Professor Bingo's Snuff", "The Runaway", "The Smile", and "Six and Ten Are Johnny". The rest follow after. I was surprised at Mr. Asimov's story. He's done much better.

The illos for the stories were superb and of course the best were for "Six and Ten Are Johnny". I say "of course" because, they're Finlay.

I guess I've babbled enough and taken enough space so all I can say is a parting "I hope this gets printed".

Mel Chase
1119 Foster Avenue
Brooklyn 30, New York

If you think placing Mr. Fairman's story first in the new FANTASTIC helped get this letter into print, Mel, you're wrong. We weren't at all afraid of the gun Fairman kept trained on our belt buckle. —Ed.

SHORT STORY

Mr. Editor:

I write you a letter—you won't publish

the facts in it, because I won't sign it. I don't want to be involved in a big controversy and am too busy preparing for the Change to be bothered by fool questions at this time.

Silly, how all of your writers seem to have exhausted the possibilities of Earth, and have to talk of other planets all the time—only two are inhabited, and not by gross, evil, destructive, dishonest and immoral creatures like our species; you *almost* had a *great* discovery in your hands; it isn't the proper time for humans to find out all about those so-called "Flying Saucers"—those who operate them don't care for any contact with the human race, although *there are* three people in this country who have contacted them, and you may be sure they aren't going to disclose their identity! I have permission to tell a limited amount, to set people straight who seem to fear these ships are from another planet—the human race is in no danger from them, except a few individuals who disappear from time to time leaving no trace—they are used in experimental work like humans treat dogs and other defenseless animals—if it is right for humans to abuse animals only *slightly* beneath them, then these people (they don't like to be called "people") have a perfect right to use humans the same way—they are as far ahead of us, as we are ahead of the apes.

Their only reason for crossing the line into our dimension or plane of vibration is this: they can travel faster with less power in our type of atmosphere, and they also extract something from our air, which our smart scientists know nothing of; if they took it *all* we'd not be able to live but a short time.

They have knowledge that would enable the human race to increase their life span to a thousand years and more! But humans aren't fit to have such knowledge—they allow sexual appetites to rule them, and breed like lowest animals, then start wars to thin out the surplus. Those on the *other side* are waiting for the human race to destroy themselves with atomic tinkering; they've watched the human race crawl up and out of the mud and slime, and evolve religions as evil as themselves, to retard their progress—mentally and morally, they are still creatures of slime, even if physically clean, which they are not.

Now, you wonder what this is about—

so I'll tell you more: every summer, I do a lot of camping out, in out of the way spots, and I go alone, because I never found anyone who was a good camping companion—I don't like people much, anyhow.

Two years ago, I saw a so-called "Flying Saucer" at rest on the water in a small cave, almost surrounded by woods; it was quite moonlight, and I had an open-front tent in the edge of the woods. The instant I came out of the woods, windows, or ports in the Saucer began to glow with a purple light, which changed to orange, and then it was gone, so quickly it was a mere streak; I had been within twenty feet of it, and judged it to be about sixty feet in diameter. (Later experience taught me that there are several sizes, from twenty to five-hundred feet in diameter.)

I wanted to meet those "saucer" people (?) but they always got away—now I thought they'd be back, sooner or later, and if I left some sort of note or message, perhaps they'd not leave next time I approached. So I drew a picture of a Saucer on a large sheet of drawing paper, with a lot of people in a circle around one, holding his hand out—this sheet I pasted on a signboard on a stake and drove it in the mud at the edge of the woods where they could see it—and pencilled a note on it, too, even though I didn't suppose they'd know our language. (They *do*, though! Their vocal cords won't allow them to articulate our words, and their voices are on a different vibratory frequency—but they can *read* and *write* our lingo; they've known all about us, from the beginning!)

I camped in these woods *two months* waiting—and gave up a trip to Alaska to do it; it was worth it, believe me.

For one night (August 6, 1950), the saucer came back; I kept out of sight, and one of the ports opened, out of which came seven or eight small figures about three feet high (they are about eight feet tall on their own plane, where matter is more attenuated) and they at once saw the sign; one went to the port, gave some signal, and about twenty-five more came out; they seemed to disagree, but finally all lined up and kept looking steadily at shore where my tent had been the time before. After several seconds I came slowly out of the trees, and they gathered all around. Most of them seemed to hold humans in contempt—who can blame them?

It was only after a good deal of effort, that I succeeded in convincing them that I didn't like any humans either, which is why I camp *ALONE*! They became very friendly, and one held out a funny-looking green pencil and red slate to me—then took the pencil and wrote "We talk with this", then handed it back to me—that's how I found out they know our lingo, and how I learned a lot *more*!

By changing an ordinary TV set slightly, adding two more "gadgets" I know

about, one can *receive word* from them at any time—my big TV set in the front room can be disconnected from the aerial, and I've *another different* one in a concealed closet in the basement—and I *get lots of news far ahead of* newspapers and ordinary radio!

I'd put in a sending set, but the government would get nosy, so I have to be content with one way communication *most* of the time. However, I've a friend over the line, who sometimes comes over alone—unless one is inside a transition cabinet or Flying Saucer crossing is a pretty painful experience—I don't care to repeat it but once more, when I leave this idiotic society for good—that will be before long. Ha! Another disappearance, for smart relatives to wonder about, blast 'em!

When I *do* cross over, I plan to try and get them to have a "workshop" to "experiment" in, and help to get some of those "humans" (?) over there, who are picking on poor defenseless animals—I'd like that, using them for *subjects*.

This letter will be posted more than a hundred miles from my home, and you might as well give up wondering who I am—you won't find out!

So *you* wonder if the "Saucers" are *real*, do you? *What a laugh!!*

There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamed of in your philosophy.

Good-by, Mr. Editor.

No comment.

—Ed.

DAT OLD DEBBIL, SEX.

Dear Mr. Browne:

This is my first letter to AMAZING STORIES and I would like to compliment you on the originality of your magazine (forgive me for not using "zine", but I can't stand this new terminology). I did not pick AS from the newsstand and immediately shout with ecstasy, "Lo and behold! This is the pick of the bunch." On the contrary, I have read quite a few different sf mags, including FANTASTIC, GALAXY, WONDER, FUTURE, STARTLING, THRILLING WONDER, etc., but never have I hit a magazine as enjoyable and as educational as AS.

Your story material, for the most part, is excellent. "The Reluctant Traitor" was a masterpiece, and I sat up all night, unwilling to put it down. I also liked "The Iron Men of Venus" exceptionally well, and Rog Phillips' "The Visitors". I have no beef concerning story lengths, either, but I would like to see the letter columns a little longer. I find the small fill-in articles such as "Planetoids with Tails", "Oil—or Juice" and "Stop Sign in Space" very interesting and certainly one of the indis-

pensible prerequisites that make this a truly great magazine.

As for the sexy covers, oh, puh-leez! Don't follow the examples of other mags with their half-dressed cuties. Look at it sensibly. Many of my friends and I read AS for enjoyment, and enjoyment only, not to ogle at (censored) females. Surely, Mr. Browne, there are enough sexy mags on the newsstands to satisfy the sex-mad world. Personally, I'm damned sick of it and I can't see why such a good mag should be jeopardized by lewd jackets. So far, you haven't sinned. (I found the January and February covers very good—excellent, in fact.) The April cover is very good except for (of course) the girl.

I hope this letter will be published because I know it will foment criticism from fellow fans. Don't get me wrong! I don't believe in this hush-hush-she's-a-bad-girl rot, but in the same breath, let's take our sex in moderation, not like a bunch of animals in springtime.

I've done some sf writings of my own. How are chances for new authors? Or do your regular writers (Messrs. Wilcox and Phillips) hog all the space every month, so that no one else has a chance? No hard feeling, Don, Rog; your stuff is great and I really enjoy it.

Would be glad to hear from any fans who would like to exchange theories, ideas, of philosophies and particularly from anyone who makes telescopes. I have a small instrument but would like to build a bigger one. Thanks for printing this and as long as you keep up your superb work I'll always be a faithful admirer.

Doug Hinton

R. R. 2

Trenton, Ontario, Canada

We think you're wrong about Rog and Don muscling other writers out of the book, Doug. True, they turn up often, but always on the merits of a single story—the one they offer at that particular time. If you go back over our indexes, however, you'll find a large number of new names. New writers are selling to us all the time.
—Ed.

SEND NO MONEY

Dear Sir:

Just read Mrs. Scruggs' letter in the June issue of AMAZING STORIES and could not resist commenting. I agree wholeheartedly with most of what she said, and her letter started me to wondering if perhaps there weren't more of us satisfied fans around. As in Mrs. Scruggs' case, this is the first and probably the last letter I'll ever write to any mag, and I'd like to state that, in my opinion, you could ignore most of the opinions you're undoubtedly deluged with and still not have to worry about selling your magazine. I'm speaking

of your magazine in particular, but I think that statement could apply to most of the sf mags on sale. What I mean is that the opinions you receive are from what is relatively a small portion of your readers and the rest must be fairly well satisfied, or they wouldn't continue to buy the mag. Personally, I rarely run across a story that I can't manage to enjoy, and that's what I buy your magazine for: enjoyment. It takes me about an hour to read the average sf mag, and I figure I've gotten my money's worth. (What some of these people want for a quarter!) This letter wasn't written for publication, but just in case you decide to publish it, I'll mention that I've about two dozen fairly recent sf mags around and will send them to the first person in any foreign country who'll write and promise to reimburse me for the postage. First come, first served, and DON'T send any money, a promise is sufficient.

Another satisfied and completely happy fan,

Al Clark

1214 Terrace

Fresno, California

We don't ignore opinions, Al. But we work on the basis that the majority rules. Readers are, truly, in the editor's chair. If enough of them voice a complaint, they can change the policy of any magazine. —Ed.

A SPOT FOR OLD COPIES.

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the June edition of AMAZING STORIES very much. (I am sure everyone else did too.) I especially liked "Fifty Thousand Nuggets", by Don Wilcox. I also liked "Secret of the Dark Planet" by Milton Lesser.

If anyone has any copies of AMAZING STORIES from January 1948 to December 1950, would they please send them to Gregory Miller? I would appreciate it very much.

I hope that you will print my letter, but it is not very probable.

Gregory Kale Miller
Route 2

McCracken, Kansas

CANADIAN TRADER

Dear Mr. Browne:

I've just started to read AMAZING STORIES. Well, you've got another fan. Just finished June '52 issue. Your lead story "Secret of the Black Planet" was the best. I didn't like the way the story "They Fly So High" ended.

I missed the December '51 to March '52 issues. I wonder if any who read this would pass them on to me. I've got some western pocket books, also some old SHADOW magazines to trade. I sure would appreciate this. All of your stories are good by me, so—keep 'em coming!

Yours waiting for more good sf—

Clifford Townsend

Box 654

Swift Current, Sask., Canada

BENNY LIKES 'EM LONG

Dear Mr. Browne:

"Son of the Black Chalice" by Milton Lesser was swell. Even better than the first story about the Black Chalice. I like your duologies and trilogies. They're really not serials, you know. Needless to say, I wait breathlessly for the next Gurnund Ritroon stories.

Right here and now I cast a vote for longer novels even if you do have to use serials. I see nothing wrong with serials in AMAZING. It would not be the first time serials have been used in AMAZING. You're running one now. ("Master of the Universe".) And you have said that you plan to run another. (Don Wilcox's "Giants of Mogo" sequel.) Just keep it up if it means longer novels.

I was surprised to see that some people want to do away with the Club House. I agree with them partly, though. I think it should be restricted to fan news and such, and not to personal "editorials" such as Rog Phillips has been writing.

The cover of the July issue was the best for this year except maybe the one on the January issue.

In the letter department someone mentioned L. Taylor Hansen and his series. What has happened to him?

Benny Sodek
1415 South Marsulis
Dallas, Texas

There have been quite a few letters lately having to do with the Club House. Some cons, but far more pros. Also valuable suggestions. We are reading them carefully. —Ed.

REPORT ON JUNE ISH.

Dear Editor:

The subject of this letter? The June issue of AMAZING. First the cover—way below average. Why not have Robert Jones do another cover for you? While some of the fans seem to think that you used Jones too much, nothing can get around the fact that he was the best you ever had. First place goes to "Fifty Thousand Nuggets" by Don Wilcox, although this reminded me of a western (I hate westerns) I enjoyed it very much. "They Fly So High" is a close second. This story has excellent possibilities for a sequel. Just what is Skutch's secret weapon? Will Dornley join forces with Skutch? The only way to answer these questions is to have Rocklynne do a sequel.

While I like Milton Lesser stories, I did

not care too much for "Secret of the Black Planet". Next month's story may prove to be better.

Bob Goodney
700 Ellis Avenue
Ashland, Wisconsin

SHAVER FANS—FRONT AND CENTER.

Dear Editor:

I'm sixteen and have been reading sf mags for only a very short time.

OTHER WORLDS ties with AMAZING STORIES for first place and FANTASTIC takes second.

Most of your covers are excellent. I've seen only a very few that were only fair.

I have one question that maybe some of your readers can answer. Just what is all this Shaver Mystery?

Keep up the swell stories. I hope you have loads of them by Rog Phillips! He can really write!

Peggy Robinette
Box 301
Morehead, Kentucky

Rog Phillips is rolling again and we are expecting a carload of terrific stories in the near future. —Ed.

A COLLECTOR

Dear Editor:

Here is one of those "firsts" again. I have been reading AMAZING STORIES since its inception, and have always found it very enjoyable. I read for pleasure and relaxation, and never could understand why so many readers analyze and dissect a story. As far as I am concerned, it would take all the enjoyment out of them.

It is true that stories like the "Green Man" and "So Shall Ye Reap" will stick with me, they were so wonderful, while others I forget as soon as I read them; but they are all good. You wouldn't be buying them if they weren't.

As for covers and long or short stories, whatever they may be, keep them coming. I like them all.

Now please for something else. I have quite a collection of AMAZING dating back to 1927 and 1930, the old Triplex mags, AIR WONDER and WONDER STORIES, all in good or fair condition. Also AMAZING and FANTASTIC from 1948 to present time, and OTHER WORLDS and IMAGINATION complete. I would like to sell all. Please send wants and prices.

I sincerely hope you print this and thanks again for many absorbing and wonderful hours of reading.

David Brown
5478 West 99th Place
Los Angeles 45, California

THE EARTH-MASTERS

WITH THE recent news of routine flights over the North Pole and the occupation of floating ice islands by meteorological observers, the full realization of our mastery of the Earth comes home. It is hard to recall that, a mere twenty or thirty years ago, the Arctic still held terror for men. But the airplane has changed all this and, since the plane has become a tool rather than an "adventure-weapon", Terra truly has been taken. There is no inaccessible spot on Earth if men wish to visit it badly enough. The next frontier must be space!

With all the optimistic talk of rocketry, there still is much to be done, and many lessons can be drawn from the experience of aircraft, particularly in the Arctic regions and at high altitudes. Man is a fragile animal despite his adaptive abilities.

Aircraft pilots in the Arctic, as well as their mechanics, know the infinite effort necessary for tending machinery. Experience in the Korean war has shown that high altitudes in partially pressurized cabins constitute a part-way ticket to death. These hazards in planes are difficult to overcome by the very nature of the crude machines. It is this that leads scientists to believe that conquering space may be

easier than conquering the air has been. That sounds like an exaggeration, but it is not.

In a rocket, men are sealed-in, living under conditions no different, essentially, from those on Earth. This is not true in the Arctic nor in a high-flying plane. So long as a man's body is held at the correct temperature and he is supplied with air at the right pressure, the hazards and discomforts of free-fall, of subtle radiations, of strange sights, are not impossibly great.

To sum up, the fundamentals of rocketry now rest on fuels and power, not on structure, habitation or theoretical problems. Terra has been overcome; men have mastered the sea, the land and the air. Only space remains. And space, with the conceivable exception of radiation, is not the irresistible foe that the Earth offers. Synthetic environments in sealed chambers can be better built than airframes!

When human beings can behold their own globe shining beneath them from the fifteen-hundred-mile altitude of a space station, the job will have been done. "The animals of the land, the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air" will have added to their number "men in space".

—William Karney

MARCH OF THE PLASTICS

WHILE PLASTICS have been with us since Dr. Baekeland's venerable bakelite, their progress has followed the conventionally slow and moderate application. At first plastics were hailed as a sort of cure-all, but now common sense reigns and plastics are to be found replacing other materials and in completely new applications.

There is one field, however, in which plastics appear destined to supplant Mother Nature's offerings completely—textiles. Synthetic textiles are available of such high quality, such relative cheapness, and such utility that many natural textiles have to all intents and purposes been supplanted. Silk provides the great case in point.

The fusion of synthetic plastics with glass and with metal constitutes the best

example of what the future will be like for these miraculous substances. By the combination of the adhesive and surface properties of plastics with the strength and durability of metals, new substances are created which may in time take over the major functions of the familiar sheet metals. Our civilization is built on sheet steel and aluminum. Plastic-glass, that is, plastic with glass fibres embedded in it, is ideally suited for sheet materials, equal in every way to conventional sheet metal and superior to it in corrosion and weather-resistance.

Prophecy is not easy, and it's downright dangerous, but one of the certainties of the future, both near and remote, is the fact that plastics—alone and in combination—will be among the most important structural materials!

—Tom Lynch

MATHEMATICS AREN'T NUMBERS

NO SINGLE branch of learning is more misunderstood than mathematics. Most people, even those acquainted with relatively advanced branches of the art, will say that mathematics is "the science of numbers and symbols" and let it go at that. Nothing could be further from the truth. Arithmetic is not mathematics and it is merely happenstance, blended with practicality, that people learn about numbers before they learn about mathematics!

This heretical statement is founded in fact. As for the deepest-thinking philosophers, logicians and mathematicians, these conclude that mathematics is essentially a symbolized logic, not far removed from the idea of a *game*, with pieces, rules, and inherent soundness. That mathematics is so useful, especially in science, appears to be more of a coincidence than anything else. Actually science has inspired much mathematics, but still the connection between the two remains rather more nebulous than otherwise.

It is hard to define mathematics in so many sentences. The best way to describe the abstruse subject is to consider a mathematical system, show how similar it is to a game, and then extend to the idea by means of a generalization.

To make mathematics, first you set up a system of elements. That is, you select the things you're going to talk about; these may be numbers, they may be symbols. More often they're the latter. For that matter, they may be physical objects. That's a scientific extension of the idea. Secondly, you define "operations", that is, things you can do with these symbols; combination, arrangement, perhaps addition or subtraction or multiplication. You choose a set of axioms or rules. And that is your mathematics—that's all. There is only one restriction on what happens from then on—you must be logical, you must not permit contradictions within your system. What you say or do, or what your axioms mean, may make no sense whatsoever, but they must not violate the basic logical laws leading to contradictions within themselves. Once this is accomplished, you have your mathematics.

If you do this with numbers, arithmetic results. Do it with symbols, and algebras result, calculi result. In other words, the greatest branches of mathematics, including geometry, derive from this idea of system.

Before the middle of the nineteenth century to now, this "gameliness" of mathematics wasn't generally realized, and mathematicians looked for eternal truths absolutes, things outside their rules, upon which to base the whole concept of mathematical reasoning. Of course they failed, and so the axiomatic system came into being and showed its power.

The fact that mathematics is such a necessary and powerful tool in physical thinking and in everyday life is not thoroughly explained yet. The axiomatics seem to be convinced that mathematics doesn't come from nature. Yet there seems also some subtle, not-yet-understood connection. Perhaps time will show us what this is....
—Charles Recour

ANOTHER MOON FOR JUPITER

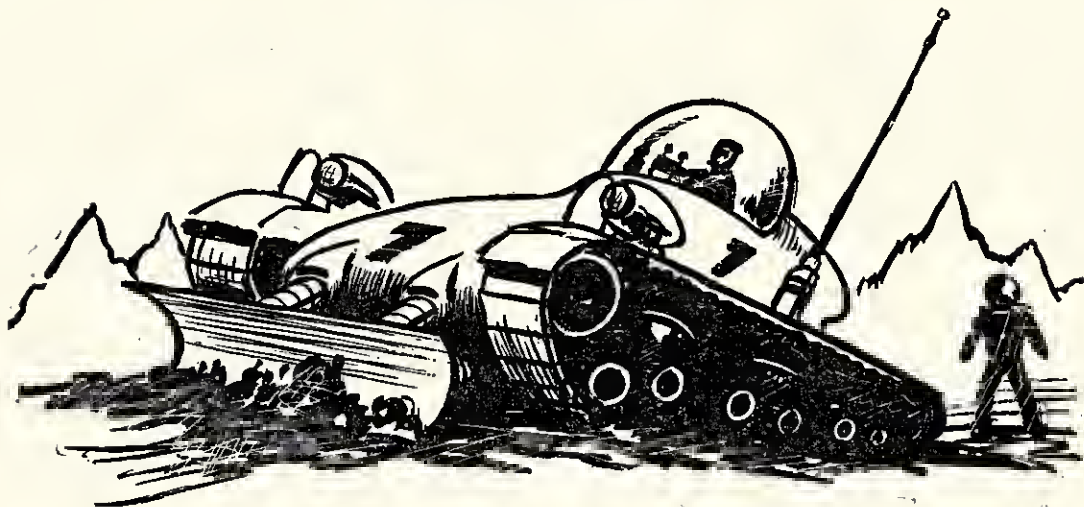
TO ANYONE who thinks that the Solar System has been thoroughly mapped, even with astronomical telescopes, the continual announcements that emanate from the observatories must be rather disconcerting. Dr. Nicholson, of Mount Wilson and Palomar, comes up with another moon for Jupiter! This makes his fourth discovery of a Jovian satellite in a relatively short time. Jupiter's family seems to be growing at a fabulous rate.

The new member of the Jovian satellite system was discovered with the hundred-inch reflector and has not yet been named, nor have its properties, mass, distance, etc., been measured. So far that gives Jupiter a total of twelve moons.

The moons in profusion possessed by Jupiter and Saturn may have no significance right now, but some day, as science-fiction authors have recognized, they may be exceedingly important. It seems that even when space travel is highly organized there will be little likelihood of our hoping to land rockets on Saturn's hideous ammonia methane surface or on Jupiter's fearful gravitational trap. But the abundant moons on each planet offer perfect observational posts and may even possess Earth-like properties, possibilities which only time can confirm or deny, since they are beyond telescopic analysis. It is generally agreed that the Jovian and Saturnian satellites will serve as stepping stones to the outer planets of Neptune and Pluto when and if men attempt to reach those incredibly distant bodies. Their low gravitational states and their presumably "comfortable" climates (relatively, of course!) make them almost natural space stations, located as nicely as stones in a flowing stream.
—June Lurie

BULLDOZER IN THE SKY

by Peter Dakin



WHEN THE initial exploratory contacts have been made with the Moon, with Mars and with Venus, the work of establishing living and operating quarters will still remain to be done. And this will be simply a matter of hard work blended with ingenuity and the full exploitation of man's bent with "Earth-moving" machinery. It is not hard to visualize what this equipment will look like and many an s-f story has treated in detail of the idea. Bulldozers, tractors, pile-drivers, and an infinite variety of the basic soil-working machines have been shown with their minor modifications. Just how would such machinery have to be changed to be suitable for interplanetary use?

Since we know most about the Moon, consider what changes would be made in a tractor, let's say, destined for that inhospitable spot. The most obvious change, of course, is that, since it will have to operate in a vacuum, it cannot be propelled by an oil or gas engine. Naturally an electric motor will do the trick, powered by batteries or—let's hope by then—powered by a simple atomic electric generator. In addition a sealed, windowed cell will serve as the operator's cab, equipped with air apparatus, heating equipment and communications. As for the rest, the treads, large wheels and the like, they will be much the same as on Earth, though wherever rubber ordinarily appears some silicon derivative suitable for vacuum use will have to be substituted.

Mars, on the other hand, will offer fewer problems. Because of the existence of air—even at low pressure—a conventional gas

engine could be used, if necessary, as a prime mover, assuming that the fuel problems for oil, gas, or coal could be solved. These materials may exist on the Red Planet so they cannot be sold short. The big factor in colonizing a planet is the resources available. The rest of our hypothetical tractor will undoubtedly be identical with that ubiquitous vehicle here on Earth, with just minor modifications—air-pressure increasers for breathing, and so on.

If Venus is the primitive Mesozoic land that it has always been considered, "Venus-moving" equipment will take much the same form as some of the bloated vehicles used in swamplands here on Earth. Huge tires, floating bodies, water-tight cabins, will be the main features.

By extension, it is not difficult to imagine or visualize any of these changes. Earth-moving machinery will be vital to any colonization of the planets just as it has proved to be here on Earth for turning wildernesses into paradises. The big problem will be power, of course, unless, by the time the planets are reached, we have learned to tame atomic energy and make it produce usable electricity. If this objective is attained, the problems all but vanish.

You can be sure of at least one thing. The operators and colonizers will be as tough and as resourceful and as courageous as any frontiersmen here on Earth have ever been. And the Venusian bulldozer operator will curse just as effectively as his prototype the historical mule-skinner!

YOU CAN'T LEARN EVERYTHING

THE FUTURE of learning, of science, of all knowledge, looks bleak indeed. The reason is not that there won't be enough of such work—but rather that there'll be too much!

If that sounds like a fantastic idea, all you have to do is walk into any library, preferably a technical one, and look over the lists of periodicals and books which are published on technical matters each year. An examination of the technical journals, of which there are thousands all over the world, shows countless hundreds of thousands of research projects, ideas and experiments are carried out, written up, published, and filed away. And who ever sees them again? A researcher interested in a special problem can look over the literature and find out what has thus far been done. But he can never be sure that some obscure researcher in Timbucktoo has not already accomplished the work he has set for himself!

In other words, there is so much to learn and to know that no one mind can possibly absorb more than a small fraction of it, especially now, when everything is becoming so specialized. Science and learning are literally choking and drowning in their own prolificness.

That this problem is important has been recognized: steps are being taken to solve it. For one thing, technical libraries are classifying and cataloging their vast collections as efficiently as possible, so that the work of a man in Bangkok can be immediately available to a researcher in Louisiana.

But that is just a make-shift measure. The solution will only be attained when cybernetics applies its mechanical and electronic brains to the job. This is a definite project for the not-remote future. Machines must be constructed which will have filed within them the world's knowledge, available at the touch of a push-button. Furthermore, such extensive thinking powers must be built into a mechanical library-brain of this type, that it will not only select all the data bearing on a given problem, but will also disclose any facts connected even remotely with that problem. In other words, the cybernetic brain must be able to help the researcher by performing a sort of thinking process.

However, even the development of so efficient a machine as this does not relieve our need for geniuses who can correlate vast bodies of knowledge from disparate fields, combine them, and come up with new sciences. Today the situation is so bad that a physicist or mathematician in one field is likely to be unable to comprehend what another colleague in a different field is talking about. That must be corrected and that is a task of the immediate future.

—Merritt Linn



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PHOTOSYNTHESIS

THE ANSWER TO LIFE?

by Charles Recour



ONE OF THE major dreams of the scientific world is to discover the secret of photosynthesis, the process whereby sunlight is changed into an energy-form which produces carbohydrates in plants and ultimately all the chemical energy on Earth. We are still using coal and oil which were formed by the fossilization of plants which were in Earth's youth formed by sunlight. In other words, all the energy we use on Earth, with the exception of atomic energy, may be directly attributed to the process of photosynthesis. Scientists have realized that the mechanism of photosynthesis will probably supply the missing link in much understanding—perhaps even give an answer as to what is life! In any event the last fifty years have seen a tremendous amount of research in this field. Now it is beginning to pay off.

From the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute recently came Doctor Otto Warburg, who is now working with our own Dr. Dean Burk. Warburg's latest experiments have demonstrated the physical nature of the photosynthetic process. It is known that a single quantum of energy causes some unknown substance in algae to combine

with one molecule of carbon dioxide and release one molecule of oxygen. The cycle repeated three times produces one molecule of the carbohydrate.

Dr. Warburg consulted with Einstein in order to get an understanding of just how quanta reaction take place. Einstein at the time couldn't handle the theoretical difficulties, but at present they've been ironed out and the tough mechanism of photosynthesis seems to be pretty well on its way to a solution.

What this may mean is overwhelming. It would provide the first direct method Man has known to fix radiant energy, to change it into some useful material as Nature has been doing for countless eons. It might even lead to the synthetic manufacture of liquid fuels directly from sunlight! This seems far-fetched, but accepting something considerably more conservative, the process of artificial photosynthesis may lead to the manufacture of synthetic foods.

Life ultimately reduces to a photosynthesis process, since all living matter ingests food in some way and transmutes its energy to motion. Students of photosynthesis realize that this process is the clue to life. We may be nearer to discovering something basic than we know.

In a subtle sort of way there is a revolution going on in biology. It is creeping more and more into prominence and authorities in all sciences have suggested that it is in this field that the great discoveries of the future are to be made. They claim that even the physical sciences will coast to a gradual decline with more and more application of them to the biological sciences about which men know practically nothing yet. The day of the "butterfly-catching biologist" is gone and in his stead is the man who applies the learning of modern physics in laboratories more nearly resembling machine shops. Biology is as close to man as you can get—and we're getting closer!

TOPOLOGY ROUND THE BEND

by E. Bruce Yaches

EVERYONE thinks he knows what a "curve" is, acquainted with modern mathematics or not, and perhaps intuitively this is true—especially on the beach! But as delectable as those curves are, they are not exactly what a mathematician means when he says curve—frequently he isn't sure himself. Actually there is an exact definition of a curve, of course—precise, almost pedantic, but it is not of the greatest interest to the mathematician.

The curves which interest the symbol-jugglers are those commonly referred to as "pathological". A pathological curve is not one involving a matter of sanity—and yet in a way it is. For example, consider a conventional smooth curve, such as a circle or an ellipse. It requires no great mathematical insight to realize that at every point on such a curve a tangent, a straight line touching it at one point, may be drawn. This is common sense and it is mathematically clear, too.

That's ordinary curvature. But in the pathology of curves, mathematicians have produced curves, smooth to the eye, continuous, obeying the definition of curve, which possess a tangent at no point! If this seems inconceivable, you have merely to construct such a curve by drawing a zig-zag line and allowing the number of zigs and zags to approach infinity. The result is a curve without a tangent. Actually there are hosts of such pathological curves. Their value is more important in mathematical analysis than in applied mathematics.

Equally curious is general topology, the geometry of the "rubber sheet", as it's often called. This branch of mathematics concerns those geometrical properties of figures which do not change—remain invariant, they say in high-powered terms—under any deformation of the sheet except tearing. You might think, visualizing a circle drawn on a sheet, say, of rubber, that by twisting and stretching the rubber, you'd have nothing left, certainly nothing connected with a circle. But that isn't true. A definite property is preserved. That is, the circle which divided the rubber sheet into an inside and an outside still preserves this relationship. Trivial, you say? Not so. When the boys go into a high-powered philosophical discussion of the basic nature of math, invariably this "inside-outsideness" of things comes up.

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It is a curious fact, incidentally, that a novice encountering advanced mathematics for the first time is quite often struck by what appears to be much ado about nothing. Frequently it seems, at first encounter, that advanced mathematics is a multitude of platitude, a mountain laboring and bringing forth a mouse. This is a deception. Nothing requires more laborious thinking, more analytical reasoning and more sound cogitating than the abstruse realms of basic mathematical theory. The crack about "you don't know what two and two equal..." is not as funny as it sounds. It really is quite a job to show what that trivial statement means. Mathematics—advanced—is a very ethereal realm!

HELICOPTER HEAVEN

Geoffrey C. Martin

AS OFTEN as this magazine has discussed the helicopter, it is always a little behind in developments. It seems the engineers won't let well enough alone. They're producing new variations on an old theme at a fantastic rate. This was recently revealed by disclosures of what English engineering is doing in the helicopter field. Having seen what the helicopter can do—noting in particular the successes of our men in Korea—the English have seized on the machine and, with traditional aircraft skill, have begun to develop the helicopter along a variety of lines.

Particularly impressive—and significant—is the stress that the English lay on the jet-powered helicopter, an idea which originated here, and which should be closely followed. The perennial bane of helicopter engineers is the link between the power plant and the rotor blades. With an ordinary aircraft engine, there are involved hydraulic-mechanical-electric arrangements of transmitting power which are nightmares of complexity and unreliability. The gearing and controlling of helicopter blades through conventional means produces vibrations and rattles which, because of inherent imbalance, cannot be avoided.

As a result, nearly all English helicopters have reverted to the engine-outside-the-plane version. This simply means that the engines, instead of being linked with the rotors, are mounted on the tips of the rotors. You guessed it—jets!

Jets mounted on the wing-tips of the rotors require almost no complex mechanical arrangements. Simple fuel lines lead through the rotor blades to convey the "juice". A modest electric starting plant is all that is needed. This latter is a bit of a problem, but it too can be solved. The result is that there is no vibration, no tearing, shaking oscillations to destroy the helicopter, or to wear it out.

As with all jet types, the basic difficulty is fuel consumption. A jet is inherently inefficient at low speeds, and helicopters are not intended to be high-speeders. Studies of fuel-burning, however, should eventually lick this problem.

Another English variant on the familiar helicopter involves the use of gas turbines. This probably will be the final answer to jet control. Here only the most rudimentary gearing is needed between engine and blades. The gas turbine, vibrationless by design and nature, provides a perfectly smooth torque at all times, one which may be controlled simply by varying the speed of the turbine. And so far turbines have not proved to be impossible fuel consumers. A little high, yes, but just for the time being. The English attitude is that the helicopter is the flying vehicle of the future; the gas turbine is its power plant!

WAR IN THE DARK

by Jack Winter

IT IS NOT often that the highly refined weapons of the laboratory filter down to the infantryman. "Hey, Mac," shouts a soldier, "who said this was a 'push-button' war?" as he slides along his belly in the mud, shoving his rifle ahead of him. Despite the tanks and aircraft of modern warfare, the bazookas, the radar and the atomic bombs, the foot soldier carries much the same equipment his predecessor of fifty years ago carried—a rifle and a bayonet! His long-distance travel may be done by plane, or boat or truck or jeep, but in the showdown he's on his feet—or face.

Once in a while, however, some basic improvement is given him. The rocket (in the form of the bazooka) has given the soldier a weapon with which he can fight armored monsters. The machine gun and the automatic rifle have given him tremendous firepower. Most recently, a weapon used slightly in the Second World War has been revived and is being used today. It's a Buck-Rogers gadget straight from the laboratory—it gives a man eyesight in the dark!

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compact attachment which fits the barrel of a rifle. From it, powered by storage batteries or dry cells, a sharply focused beam of invisible infrared light emanates. When it strikes an object it is reflected back to the scope where a sensitive screen translates it into visible light in the form of a glow on a screen like a muted television tube.

You see the enemy—but he doesn't see you! The results are inevitable. Bang!—and it's over. Enlarged versions of this device are mounted on trucks, and tanks and armored vehicles can duel with each other in the utter darkness like a blinded dinosaur fighting one with sight.

What role this instrument might play in the future in a civil way is hard to imagine, since ordinarily we are lavish with light and lighting devices. Infrared vision seems restricted to spying activity primarily—some genius undoubtedly will turn up with a good use for it—that's the way science operates!

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H. B. HICKEY

(continued from second cover)

short-short to novel. I have saved beautiful women from fates worse than death, I have tracked the killer to his lair, defeated the cattle barons, disrupted the oriental dope traffic and found adventure in the skies above Jupiter and Venus.

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